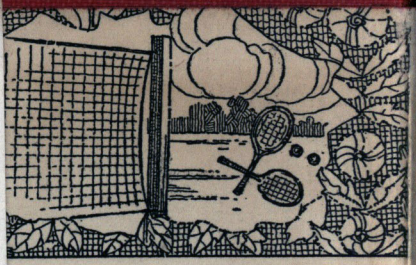
the JADE necklace

A MYSTERY
STORY FOR GIRLS

Pemberton Ginther



THE JADE NECKLACE

By PEMBERTON GINTHER

Roselyn Blake, the daughter of an explorer and scientist, has been left a Chinese jade necklace by her father. She lives with her guardian, his wife, son and daughter; her best friends. They move to a great house in the country and much to their surprise are visited by a Chinese nobleman, his adviser, a philosopher, and his servant, the evil-looking Hop Kee. Strange things begin to happen. Roselyn becomes suspicious of Hop Kee. The atmosphere of the house is tense with mystery. Is the Chinaman after the Jade Necklace or are his plans more sinister?

Only Roselyn's courage enables her to solve the mystery.

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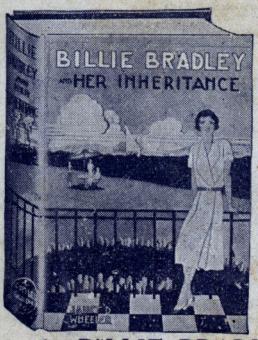

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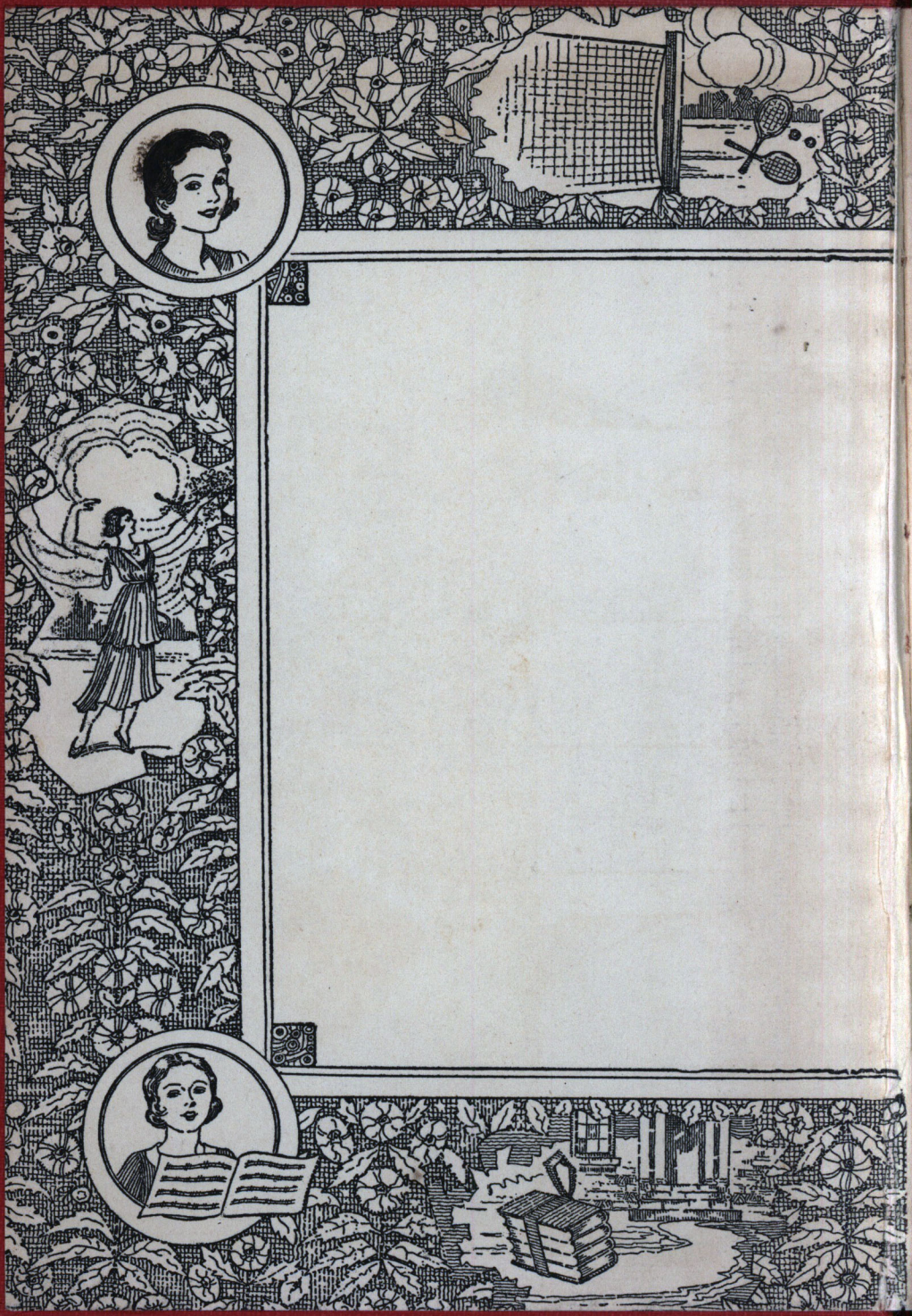

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THE JADE NECKLACE

"A JADE NECKLACE!" SHE SAID SOFTLY.

"The Jade Necklace" (See page 33)

THE JADE NECKLACE

A MYSTERY STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

PEMBERTON GINTHER

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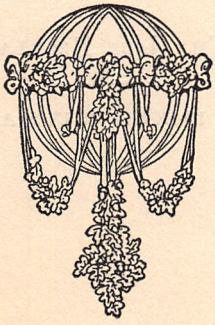

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MYSTERY STORIES
FOR GIRLS

By PEMBERTON GINTHER

Large 12 mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE SECRET STAIR
THE JADE NECKLACE
THE THIRTEENTH SPOON

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THE JADE NECKLACE

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

To the Honorable Marguerite Fairfax—whose brave spirit is a gay banner in sunshine and shadow.

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CHAPTER I

PAST AND PRESENT

ROSLYN BLAKE walked home through the crowded streets, whose pavements were hard, straight paths between tall cliffs; cliffs that were filled with office windows and topped by cornices gilded by the low-dropping, September sun. She did not see the shop-windows full of autumn offerings, nor did she hear the strident hum of city traffic; for she was moving in a world of her own: a new-born world of hope and ambition.

The everyday world had vanished just twenty minutes ago, when Mr. Capponi, standing by the grand piano in his shabby studio, had held up a shaking, rheumatic finger at her, as she finished the Chopin Prelude he had set her to play for him.

"It is as I expected this long time," he said, in his precise English. "You must now leave me. Loring has sent a pupil to Paris, so I shall place you with him. Yes, you have got beyond me. Once I might have gone very far, but now . . ."

The music had raised such a tumult in her heart that at first she did not catch the meaning of his speech. Then she had paled before the wonder and delight of it; Loring, the great Loring, was she to go to him?

"But he only takes the best pupils——" she began.

"Do not fear," he had interrupted. "You will be of the best, if you will give yourself entirely. There is no half-way in art, my child. And remember, we are only instruments that the spirit plays on. It is our task to keep fit to receive the message. I shall see Loring at once. To-morrow."

"So soon?" she cried, a little afraid. "Can't I stay with you a while? You have been so good to me. You have always understood."

Dear old Capponi, how he had scolded her in his kind way! He was, he had told her, a broken instrument, with his rheumatism and his failing sight. "A two-penny music-box, my dear, to amuse babies, that is now Capponi," he had ended, with a grimace. "But you have life before you. And the gift of music. Never say, 'It is impossible.' Say always, *always,* 'I will!' You will need courage, for it is a hard path. Yet you must say, 'Nothing is impossible.'"

She had said it after him, "I will," though she quaked at the thought of Loring's bitter criticisms. He might not accept her. Yet she had never known Capponi to make promises he could not fulfil. Fine old Capponi, who was so true an artist that he could step aside with a smile. "I'll never find anyone so good to me," she told herself, as she went down Chestnut Street. "And Loring is so terribly expensive——"

Mr. Chilton might not give her the money for the lessons; he had seemed to grudge her even her

monthly allowance recently. She had not got September's check yet, though it was now near the end of the month. She would have to ask for all of that portion of her small inheritance which had been set aside for her musical education, for Loring's charges were as high as his reputation. She would need courage to face her guardian, but in this exalted mood she repeated the words almost gaily, "I will. Nothing is impossible."

"He'll think it extravagant, of course," she thought, as she turned into the quieter street that stood, like a back eddy in the busy tide of city life, in the midst and yet apart from the business section. It was a short street with a few ancient, well-kept houses with high windows and beautiful wrought-iron handrails to their marble steps, and in the few months she had lived there with the Chiltons she had come to love its dignity and its placid age.

She ran up the steps of Number Four and rang the bell,—Mr. Chilton did not allow any female of his family the masculine privilege of a door-key. Maggie, the kitchen-maid of former days, the last of the troop of servants that had belonged to the more prosperous days of the Chilton family, wore a broad smile when she saw who it was. She raised a finger of caution as Roslyn laid her hand on the knob of the closed door of the vestibule.

"Whist, Miss Rose, and step aisy," she whispered behind her hand. "Sure Miss Sary and Himself have had a word, and it's cold silence betwixt them now, and her the friend of him agin the whole world till now."

Roslyn halted, with the first chill on her enthusiasm. If he had begun to quarrel with gentle Miss Sarah ——

"Are they in the sitting-room?" she asked.

"Miss Sary is settin' by her lone, but Himself has went up to his private apartmints, Miss Rose. He was a-askin' her about her property, y'see, and wantin' her to put it with some friend of hisn, and she would do none of that. I wuz in the room dustin' the whiles, and they went right on."

Roslyn halted in spite of herself. Perhaps, after all, it was only a trivial affair which Maggie magnified. She must hear for herself.

"And after she denied him, they sat a whiles till Miss Sary, in her ladylike way, mintioned the new autumn styles, jest to make a divarsion, as it were. And she complained sorrowful of bein' too thin, even fer the rejuced fashions. And then Himself, as he took his leave of her and smilin' full at her, tells her if she is tired of bein' so rail-thin, she'd do well to eat corn, for that's what they use to fatten hogs."

"No!" cried Roslyn under her breath.

"It's the truth of the ages," affirmed Maggie with scandalized relish. "And she riz up like the Queen of Sheba before Solyman, and thanked him royal-like for the words, and then she sat down by the winder and never cast a look at him again. She's been there, sore hurt, pore lady, fer an eft of time. Mebbe you'd step to her to hearten her up a bit."

Roslyn nodded and turned the knob. "What time will dinner be ready to-night?" she asked.

She must allow herself half an hour to win over Mr. Chilton. The ten minutes she had intended to spend with him would be too short under the circumstances.

"Sure, we'll be havin' it late, seein' it's a celybration," Maggie responded. "That yourself should be askin'!"

"Of course," laughed Roslyn, as she hurried to the sitting-room at the back of the house. "How silly to forget my own birthday." And she thought, "He ought to be nicer than usual. He knows it's my birthday, for he spoke of it this morning. Three more years, he said, as my guardian . . . oh, poor Miss Sarah, she does look sad!"

Miss Sarah was in a high state of injured feelings. She was a delicate lady of the old type that has almost passed, white-haired, high-nosed with a fine forehead that covered a veritable rabbit's brain. She had her best silver-tipped smelling bottle in use, and she laid aside her usual reserve to relate the insult she had received.

"To fatten hogs, he said," she repeated, plaintively. "He did not even use the more polite word, swine. Swine would not have been so gross. It is a wonder, though," she added, "that he did not employ the odious, coarse word that denominates the female of that species. It would hardly have been more loathesome. Hogs, indeed!"

Roslyn was truly sorry and said so with energy. "I wouldn't mind what Mr. Chilton said, though," she declared. "It gives him such satisfaction to see how he can hurt people."

"Nevertheless, my dear Roslyn, I shall leave the house," Miss Sarah announced firmly. "My sister is a martyr to that man, but I need not be. I am independent." She became angrier. "As if I would trust my money to a man who has made ducks and drakes of his own finances! No, my dear, I may be a weak woman but I know that gentlemen who lose their own fortunes are not the ones to administer my small income. Hogs, indeed! I shall tell Margaret at once, and begin to pack."

She went fluttering out of the room, leaving Roslyn with a chill at her heart. Birthdays or no birthdays, he was a hard man. He need not have insulted gentle Miss Sarah. She was going to have a struggle, that was plain. She set her lips and drew her dark brows together. It might be a battle but she meant to win. She repeated once more the magic formula of success, "Nothing is impossible. I will!" And she seemed to hear her father's clear voice as she had heard it many times since he had gone to his rest, "Anything is possible if you make up your mind to it. I've done impossible things out of sheer obstinacy." The two voices gave her chilled spirit a glow of warmth. She thought of Loring and then she began to soar. Nothing should keep her from Loring's studio. "I just have to go!" she said.

She went up the three flights of stairs and knocked on Mr. Chilton's door. He had lived up here, literally above his family, ever since they had left the fine estate on the Main Line to find economy and comfort in this last possession of Mrs. Chilton's.

When it went, as undoubtedly it would—for she was a gentle soul—there would be only cheap boarding-houses ahead. No other fortune would come from England to prop them up again. The Honorable James Henry George Chilton, third son of the late Lord Chilton of Chilton-Hundred in Sussex, England, had been cut off by his father many years before that hot-tempered gentleman had died, and what had been done in those long-gone years had never been undone. The Honorable James had remained an offence to his family, and only a couple of aunts with a sentimental regard for the family name, had cared to remember that he lived. The Honorable James had been indifferent, so long as his money lasted. When funds were low, he spoke bitterly of the aristocracy of England.

He opened the door and stood peering at her from under his heavy grey brows. He was a short, spare, lusty man, with a long horse face, beetling brows and a prominent aggressive nose. His long upper lip twitched as he waited for her to speak. He liked to embarrass people in this way.

"I've come to tell you something important," she said, quickly. "It won't take long. May I come in?"

He moved aside with a bow. He had good manners when he pleased. She stopped just inside the door, with a hand on the low foot-board of his great carved bed—the feet had been sawed low to allow the bed to have a slant—and she said, looking directly at him with her clear eyes: "I played for Mr. Capponi to-day," and abruptly stopped, for there

was an expression about his mouth that dried the words in her throat.

"Yes?" he inquired in a smooth tone. "That is no novelty; but interesting, nevertheless."

He was going to be horrid, that was plain. His tilt with Miss Sarah had whetted his appetite for battle. A gust of annoyance shook her. After all, he had promised to administer her affairs for her best good. The letter her father had written him before he died had solemnly enjoined it upon him.

"He has told me I must study with Loring," she felt some poor triumph in the statement. Mr. Chilton always brought out the worst in his associates. "I want to ask you to let me have the money Father left for my education. It will take it all, I am afraid."

She knew she ought to have been softer, more persuasive as she had intended to be, but with him looking at her with that mocking stare, she could not manage it.

He pursed his lips as if considering. Then, "I do not consider you ready for such training," he announced in a dogmatic, superior voice. "I am enough of a musician, as you will grant, to be a judge, I believe."

She did not argue that point. He was right about understanding music, for he played the violin remarkably well and had composed some airs for it, though he had never shown any interest in her progress, save to criticize Capponi's method. She went on, more gently, "Mr. Capponi says I shall make money after I have studied with Loring. It

is a great chance. I am sure Father would wish it," she added, rather tremulously.

He sat down in his straight-backed arm-chair, twitching his brows, and finally said coldly, "I do not agree with that Italian. The Italians are an emotional people. They magnify motes into mountains."

"But, Mr. Chilton, I must do as Capponi says, if I am to have a future. It is a great opportunity. I may never have another chance. Loring will take only a few pupils and the place will not be open to me long."

In her eagerness she spoke with unusual warmth, cast aside the reserve which had always held her in his presence, and there was a note of determination in her voice that was new to him. Heretofore she had been an amiable girl, not so sweet nor so satisfactory as his daughter Muriel, yet pleasant enough about the house, comfortable to his esteem. He frowned and his pale eyes under the thatch of his grey brows, gleamed like those of a small ambushed animal.

"I am the best judge of such matters," he repeated, implacably. "Capponi has his own axe to grind, no doubt. A commission perhaps from Loring. I understand these things. It will advertise him to send a pupil to Loring. Yes, I know how it is. We may consider the matter closed."

She did not move. She had made up her mind that nothing should be impossible with her. She opened her lips but he forestalled her.

"It is settled. For your own good. A young girl

cannot know what is best for her. Let me hear no more about it," he rose and began to usher her to the door. "And since Capponi has dismissed you, I shall insist that you take a vacation for a period. It will be good for you. Later on, we shall see what can be done."

"But——" she cried, involuntarily putting out a protesting hand.

"There are no buts," he interrupted in his most aristocratic way. "I have spoken . . ."

"But Father left me the money just for that!" The words were pushed out of her by her great need.

He stared at her. Never had he dreamed of such effrontery. He uttered not a syllable but stood and glared, a majestic figure—though short and bent and grizzled—a man so great in his own esteem that he impressed and almost frightened her. "I have spoken," he repeated harshly, and the tone dismissed her without appeal.

In the lower hall she saw Bob's fair head coming up from the flight below. He halted on the top step to wave her onward. He was excited and breathless but he would not let her stop to talk. She saw that he had a lumpy package under his coat and for a flash she thought it must be one of the many inventions that he spent his spare minutes trying to bring to completion; and then she remembered again that it was her birthday and the lumpy package must be a present. Bob was never shy about showing his inventions to her. She managed to fling a twisted smile back at him as she passed but, at her own room, she shut the door softly and

turned the key. She felt she had closed the door on hope.

The photograph of her father in its beaten-silver frame looked at her from the table. She flung herself on her knees before it and with both hands holding it tight, looked into the calm, strong face until a rain of tears blotted it from her sight. As it swam from her, his voice seemed to be close to her. "The thing I've learned, looking back over life, is that you must use your will. Common sense? Yes, but *will* is the door to the land of heart's desire." And again, "Don't be fussy about your own comfort or eager about pleasures. All that can wait. Hard chairs, stiff problems, take these things first. Don't get soft among those people you're going to when I've passed on. Saw the knotty board first . . . when your muscles are fit. You've had good training with me—those months in the lost lands of Africa and the jungles about Annam—don't lose your muscle . . ."

He didn't mean the muscles of her body, of course, for he was speaking about her inner fitness. How fine he had been. Erratic and unreasonable at times but alive, and eaten up with enthusiasms. He had taken her with him on vacations of the last two years, and she had experience beyond her years. She had learned to think for herself, and to work with him. He had collected the myths and strange faiths of primitive peoples and his search took him into hidden corners of the world. The picture of him in the last months burned before her, lit with a flare of love. Doubled up by weakness, with his

grey eyes alight in spite of gnawing pain, he had poured out his last gift to her, a creed of courage and hope.

"Don't be afraid of anything," he had told her on the last day. "Use sense though. Only a fool runs into needless danger."

The gift of courage was better than any other legacy, yet he had left her other things—a small inheritance that would suffice for board and education, if used with care, and besides this, there was the birthday gift. She was to open it to-night. After the dinner and gifts downstairs, she had planned to come up here alone and receive it as from his living hands. He had given her the bag just as he died, sitting there in his big chair.

"The pouch is in here," he had said, weakly smiling up at her. "Keep it for your next birthday. A rather odd story. . . ." He had to pause for breath before he added, "I'll tell you to-morrow. The snuff-bottle has value. Sell it if you have to. The other . . . a clever imitation . . ." and suddenly the wave of strength that had carried him receded and he had huddled in the chair, blown out like a flickering candle.

Wild grief had wiped the words from her mind for a long space, and even when in the adjustment of her affairs that followed she had followed his directions about keeping the contents of the small bag to herself, she had not been able to open the bag. It brought her loss too vividly before her.

To-night, however, she would delay no longer. He had told her that she must take it for a birthday

gift. She rose and went to her trunk, unlocked it and fumbled under the clothes at the bottom of it. The bag inside of the cloth bag was really a pouch, made of skin and beaded in an odd pattern. She put it in her handkerchief box in the upper drawer of her bureau. She would open it later when she had more time. Now she must bathe and dress, to be ready for the festive dinner that Mrs. Chilton and Muriel had planned for her. Dear Mrs. Chilton. A warm wave of feeling flooded her at the name. She must never hurt or disappoint Mrs. Chilton.

A light tap on her door sent her to open it wide. She knew the knock. Muriel's gentle tap always seemed to say, "Never mind, if you are busy, I can come again." She apologized for the locked door.

"I didn't mean to keep it locked," she said, in her warm low voice. "It's a bad habit,—I've lived so long in boarding-houses—how sweet you look," she broke off, in admiration. "That pink makes you look like an apple blossom."

Muriel laughed a pretty ripple of pleasure at Roslyn's praise. She loved people to approve of her, and particularly she wanted this bright strong, handsome Roslyn to like her and her pretty clothes. Muriel was sweet and loving, not very clever, but stylish; and impressionable, too. Her four years' seniority counted for nothing before the other's clear quick judgments, and she consulted Roslyn on all matters that troubled her.

"Put on your yellow dress," she urged, affectionately. "You look wonderful in it. I've a special reason. Really."

Roslyn laughed, all her clouds gone for the time "Sit down and I'll be ready in a jiffy," she promised. "You must tell me how to do my hair in the new way."

"My dear, I positively can't stop a second." Muriel's blue eyes were full of regret. "I simply must run. Mother is getting dressed and Maggie will make a mess of the table if I don't go down. Your hair looks wonderful any way you fix it. Put that gold band on, and you'll be perfect."

Roslyn looked after her with a light in her eyes. Muriel was balm to her troubled spirit and after her encounter with the Honorable James she needed all the sweetness she could get. She put on the old yellow silk that had come from Bangkok and the gold woven band that had been a savage's bracelet, and then halted a moment before the glass, more out of habit than because she wanted to look at herself. Troubled grey eyes under straight black brows, a cloud of black misty hair, skin of a healthy pallor, red lips and a slim lovely neck; these she saw not at all, for she had seen them so often that they had become as it were invisible to her: it was the gold band and the yellow frock that she dwelt upon. They brought back Annam and the Bantu country.

She caught herself up sharply. No use to go back into the past. She must go down and be happy, or disappoint Muriel, Mrs. Chilton and dear old Bobs. She pinched some color into her cheeks and turned off the gas. Just for a second as she went through the darkness to the door, she had a memory of a little, naked savage-boy peering through the tangle

of jungle grass at her as she had sat before their tent in the sunshine. He had been bulging with astonishment at her strange appearance and had hooted something at her in Bantu derision, before he ducked back into the jungle. It was his father who had sold the gold bracelet to Henry Blake. All that wild life was going on over there at this moment, in Annam and in the African *blue,* as the natives called the wilderness. Somehow the thought made her own perplexities seem less acute. She felt stronger, less anxious as to what steps she should take to follow Capponi's plans for her. She would make another attempt to soften the Honorable James.

"And there is the snuff-bottle Father spoke of," she thought, as she descended the stair. "I must look at it carefully. Perhaps he has left some note in the pouch. He always was so particular about such things. I wonder what the other thing is? An imitation, he said. Oh, how sweet the dining-room looks. They've dressed the table with yellow chrysanthemums and all the candles are lighted!"

CHAPTER II

A BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

"TRY it on!" cried Muriel. "I know you'll look wonderful in it."

Maggie was clearing the table before putting on the dessert and the birthday presents were in order. Mrs. Chilton, with a flush on her cheeks and a happy light in her blue eyes smiled across at her elder sister, who seemed to have forgotten her anger and looked singularly alert and interested. Roslyn had wondered when she saw Miss Sarah at the table and had wondered still more at the gay air with which Miss Gordon had taken the lead in the giving of gifts. Her present, a fine lace handkerchief, had been received with enthusiasm and now they were all in the best of spirits. Bob, with his mop of fair hair unnaturally smooth and a new plaid tie, could hardly wait for Muriel's package to be opened.

"Mew's got the real goods, but just wait till you see mine," he interposed, as Roslyn began to undo the silver-paper wrappings of the flat package.

"Is it the latest invention, Bobby?" Muriel asked in her soft affectionate voice, and then suddenly laughed, "I know what it is, a mouse-trap! He's heard Mother say there were mice in the panelling in your room, Roslyn, and ——"

"Oh, how sweet!" Roslyn did not hear them, for she had come to the core of the silver-paper and

found it to be a yellow necklace, like a flat flexible ribbon of crystal beads, just the color of her dress. Her eyes shone with pleasure and she jumped up and went around the table to kiss Muriel who held up her pink lips for the caress.

"Put it on, my dear, and let us see how becoming it is," Mrs. Chilton urged, in her soft English voice.

"It's the very latest thing," Muriel told her. "It's taken nearly a month to make it."

Roslyn slipped it over her head and felt it cool upon her neck. She was delighted, as much with the thought of Muriel's loving labor as with the necklace itself. They all beamed at her, and Bob declared, with his head cocked judicially, that it suited her to a gnat's heel.

"It goes so beautifully with the scarf you gave me," she said to Mrs. Chilton. "They're both lovely——"

"And now you won't have any excuse for not going to the Harpers' porch-party!" cried Muriel in triumph. "You'll simply have to go to show off your new things——"

"Attention, please!" Bob broke in on them, for he wanted to get his share of the celebration while the coast was clear. There was no knowing when his illustrious parent might choose to appear at the feast. Mr. Chilton had remained aloft so far, as a sign that he disapproved of their modest little party, but he might come down at any moment.

They turned their laughing faces to Bob's, as he rose ceremoniously, for they expected something odd, or amusing. Bob had been bitten with the

mania for invention, ever since the ebb of their last inheritance, and some of the children of his fertile brain had proved stepchildren in their refusal to act as their parent intended them.

He was not disconcerted by their laughter. He was too good-natured for that. Instead, he seemed to take pleasure in their attitude. "Never mind, laugh away," he said cheerfully. "I've got something here that won't blow up, or take fire, or hurt anyone. It isn't a mouse-trap, Mew, though it is to be used to mend something in Roslyn's room. Guess what it is."

"There isn't anything broken there, is there?" Mrs. Chilton's gentle tones were full of concern. "You should have told me, my dear . . ."

"It's glue!" cried Muriel with a burst of mirth. "Oh, Bobs, what a smelly——"

"*Mend* wasn't the right word," Bob corrected. "I ought to have said *cure,* no, that isn't it exactly. But here it is, anyway, Roslyn, and it works like a breeze." In his triumph, he fairly shouted.

As Roslyn took the lumpy heavy package, she had a flash of memory: Bob measuring her door which was always banging shut in the slightest breeze. She had wondered why he had measured it, instead of trying to adjust the hinges, but now she cried out, "I know what it is, a door-stop!"

Bob tossed his head grandly. "Right-o. But not the kind you think. Open up, do, and put Mew out of her agony." What he really wanted was to display his treasure before them all, while they were free and unquenched.

Roslyn's quick fingers brought out the heavy metal object and the effect was all that its inventor could have wished.

"Why, it's a regular swinging-door stop!" cried Muriel in ready admiration. "Bobs, you've done it, this time!"

"It looks just like those fine new ones we put on the sun-parlor doors over in Greymont," Mrs. Chilton exclaimed. "Such an elaborate affair."

"It isn't like them, though," her son declared, proudly. "This is much lighter and isn't so slow. It'll cost almost nothing to make—I'll have a hundred of 'em ready to put on the market in a month. Your door won't be waking Mother from her nap after you get that on it, Roslyn. See, this is how it works ——"

He demonstrated its action as best he could and they bent forward, eagerly watching the movements of his hands, so intent that they were unaware of a slow, heavy step on the stair. Muriel was much excited over it, prophesying that Bob would be a millionaire before he was twenty-one. Mrs. Chilton's tinkling laugh rang out like a chime of little bells, and Roslyn was full of generous rejoicing.

"If it's a go," Bob cried, carried out of himself by their applause, "we'll get a house in the country. You'll never have to swelter in town again, if I can help it, Mums. I'm going to see that you ——"

The words died on his lips at the sound of a rasping cough, and he turned to see his father standing in the doorway, surveying them with a sardonic smile on his long grey face. The effect was instan-

taneous, like a drop of acid in a glass of clear water, that turned all to a muddy hue. Miss Sarah's smile turned to ice; Muriel's gaiety died out in a breath; Mrs. Chilton's face dropped into its usual patient lines; Bob sheathed his door-stop in its wrappings and thrust it aside on the serving-table; while Roslyn felt the gladness die out of her heart. The candles seemed to burn with a grudging light and the table appeared bare and birthdays were mere foolishness.

He came forward amid an absolute silence, and took his place at the end of the table. It cheered him greatly to see how completely he had damped them. Clearing his throat, he glanced around, eyebrows twitching and lips tight with enjoyment. "Quite a little party," he observed in smooth sarcasm. "Gifts? Yes. Quite delightful gifts. I regret that I was not told. I should have brought an offering."

They all knew he had been told more than once,—for they stood in fear of what he might do if not informed—but no one contradicted him. Even gentle Muriel, his favorite, was silent, thinking it was too bad of him to take that tone, now that he had actually come downstairs. The silence stimulated him. He smiled at his wife, who looked at him with her soft blue eyes, but spoke no word. The affront to her kind, delicate elder sister was too fresh in her mind for even her gentle nature to condone.

"Let Maggie bring me a plate, my love," he commanded. "I will not interrupt your enjoyment but

I feel the need of some nourishment. Go on with your celebration. I shall enjoy it, of all things."

As he spoke Maggie came in with the tray filled with dishes of cakes and the pretty little pink molds of ice-cream. The smile was wiped from her broad freckled face as she saw him, and she set the tray down with a bump on the serving-table. Bob had to jump to snatch his door-stop, to save an upset; Muriel rose, as Mrs. Chilton sent Maggie to the kitchen for the requested dinner, and she silently went about the task of serving the dessert,—it was a task now, not a pleasure. Roslyn's indignation grew within her. She held her lips tight for fear of it spilling over.

"It is not my birthday, Robert, so I fancy you have overlooked the small matter I entrusted you with this morning." Mr. Chilton was a lofty resigned martyr, but there was something under his loftiness that assured Bob of a sound cuffing, if he and his father had been alone.

He jumped up with consternation on his face. "I forgot," he breathed. "But I'll have it in two winks," and he was off like a shot. The cigar-store was just around the corner.

The silence persisted, while Maggie brought a well-filled plate and a large cup of coffee,—when the master was in the trim-trams, as she called his most trying moods, he turned things topsy-turvy, demanding coffee with his dinner and, often as not, eating his dessert first. To-night, as he had come in at dessert-time, he did the best he could to make things hard for her.

When Bob returned, out of breath, with the tobacco, his father had dispatched his dinner and was sprinkling pepper in his coffee—an effect he employed when particularly bent on mischief. As no one protested, he cocked an eyebrow at his wife and cleared his throat.

"My love, I was wrong when I said I had no surprise for our ward. I overshot my mark. I should have said I had no small gift to offer," his voice was full of suave inflections and he smiled around the table. "I have a surprise, though it includes you all. We are to move to the country next week. There will be no necessity, Robert, for your profits on the ingenious invention to be waited for,—your mother has sold this house, and the other has already been bought."

There was a confused murmur but no questions or comment. They knew he had more to say. Mrs. Chilton's eyes looked troubled but otherwise she was beautifully serene. Roslyn marvelled at her fine composure. Muriel's brows were creased in expectancy. Bob stared as if suspecting a trick. Miss Sarah glared.

"The house, a mansion formerly belonging to the late Senator Bruce," went on the head of the family, warming to his task, "is located in a most salubrious village about fifty miles from here." Roslyn's heart dropped a beat,—fifty miles! "It is a commodious dwelling with lawns and out-buildings and a fine view of the surrounding country. An ideal spot. The late Senator Bruce was found dead in the bathroom, or rather in one of the three fine

bathrooms, but it has not been proved he was a suicide. He had been in failing health, and the loss of a sum of money,—stolen from his private safe,—that finished him, so the agent tells me. The place has been in various hands since the death of his bereaved widow, but is in good condition. I have engaged the moving-vans for Tuesday."

They were all stunned. That was the way he liked to surprise them, to do a thing by stealth and then to spring, like a tiger. Roslyn, as she sat with her eyes on the cloth, wondered why a man like that should be able to dominate all their lives. He had made a mess of his own life; liberal education, associations of wealth and power, three fortunes, all had slipped from his arrogant fingers like sand. And he wore an armor of pride and self-love that protected him from any understanding of the merits of other people.

"We will go out to Belleview on Tuesday next, all of us," he said, blandly. "I have decided, Robert, to dedicate your talents to the bar. After we are settled, I shall arrange about your entrance into Harvard. You are sufficiently prepared, I believe."

To Roslyn's surprise, Bob gulped and flushed but answered steadily, "Yes, Father. I guess I can wiggle through. The exams are pretty tough but I'll do my best." Poor Bob, who hated the law and loved science! He, too, had to yield.

She left them then and, taking her gifts, went upstairs to her room. Mr. Chilton had no power, happily, to spoil the little ritual she had planned

for the last hours of her birthday. "How could Father have left me to such a man?" she thought as she struck a match and lighted the old-fashioned gas-jet.

Yet she knew quite well how it had been. Henry Blake, on one of his rare vacations, had chanced to visit the Chiltons,—then on the full tide of the second aunt's legacy—and had seen a home circle both cultured and serene. The dinner had been perfect, the hostess full of hospitable grace, and the memory of that evening at Greymont had remained in his mind as an ideal family group. When he felt his end drawing near, it was natural enough he should remember the Chiltons,—his wife's distant connections,—and wish that his girl should find shelter with them. So he had appointed the Honorable James Henry George as guardian for the three years that remained before Roslyn's coming of age. He had trusted the Honorable James implicitly and yet, knowing the frailty of human nature, he had bound him by a letter written in clear terms, to be a guardian in the best sense of the word.

"I wonder how he got Mrs. Chilton to sign the deed ——" she began, when a conviction that Mrs. Chilton knew nothing of the sale of her property until that moment came to her. It was a trick. He had bought the house in the country, and used that fact to force his wife to sign away her right to her own property. She would have to sign now, to keep matters straight.

"He couldn't buy a house, either, without her signing *that* deed," she told herself, for her father

had trained her in business matters. "It's a queer thing . . ."

She was so strong a partisan of Mrs. Chilton that she lost sight of her own share in the problem for a while. That she was helpless in the matter of lessons from Loring was forgotten for a moment, but when it came back to her, she was doubly defeated. Fifty miles meant expensive car-fare even if she managed, by some miracle, to get the money for lessons. Impossible!

She had to give it up for the present. Perhaps something would happen to show her the way, if she were patient. She went to her bureau and took out the beaded pouch, and pressed her lips to it. All the turmoil of her blood quieted at the touch; for it was as though she felt her father's calm strength behind her.

A sandalwood box came out of the faded brocade wrappers. It was nothing unusual. It had clumsily carved Chinese figures on its sides and top and looked almost new. The clasp was the best thing about it,—a bit of red enamel on brass, like a red flower on the neutral tone of the wood. As she opened it, she caught her breath at the beauty that lay within.

"A jade necklace!" she cried softly. "What a beauty! Lavender and green and gold! I've never seen anything like it."

She took it out and examined it. It was exquisitely carved, each long bead in a slightly differing pattern and the amulet-like pendant showing chrysanthemums, dragons and lotus in marvellous

harmonious design. Such jade was almost priceless. A flare of triumph shot through her. Here, in this mysterious bit of old China, was the solution of her problem; she could sell it to a collector . . . then her father's words came back clearly, "Sell the snuff-bottle . . . but the other . . . a clever imitation . . ."

Wherever it had come from, it could not help her. It was an imitation, something to enjoy and cherish; something out of the happy past. She laid it back with a little sigh that was half regret and half relief. Perhaps there was some explanation . . . she had forgotten to look for the note which should be there. It was at the bottom of the pouch,—a mere scrap of thin paper. "Feitsui jade from Kara Kash valley,—Kuen-lun range . . . good imitation. Snuff-bottle . . . Yung Chen, 1722–1735 . . . good specimen, though damaged."

The snuff-bottle must be in the pouch also. She found it; an insignificant bundle of red stamped cotton. It proved to be a tiny jar of pure turquoise, just big enough to lie in the palm of her hand. It had a gold band about its throat and a green jasper stopper, to which, when she drew it out, hung a tiny silver spoon. The small crack at the bottom was scarcely discernible. She wished her father had told her more about these things. He knew their value.

Sitting there with the sandalwood box in her lap, she longed for him with sharp intensity. The shadowy picture of her mother who had died when she was four was a dim, childish memory, vague and

elusive; but her father had made her life. He had the knack of getting on with people, a clean mind in a fine, lithe body and a gay, exploring spirit which even illness could not dim. He had been at home everywhere; China, India, the Argentine, were all the same to him. After sharing his work and being part of his life, it was suffocating to be under the petty rule of the Honorable James. "I'll never let him lay eyes on these things," she thought. She must keep these gifts from her dear dead sacred and apart.

As she laid the treasures back in their cotton nests, a sudden memory of a controversy that had shaken the little world of collectors of ancient jewelry flashed across her mind. What was it that she had heard them talking of? Two years ago, no, it must have been three; a scandal among the professors of Oriental Art. She could not remember it clearly at first, and then it came to her. Dr. Stoner, a good, honorable man, had brought for sale some Chinese carved jewelry, that had turned out to be imitation. It had been hard on Dr. Stoner, for he had enemies. It had been said that he had an assistant who had deceived him. Could it be that the jade necklace was one of his luckless offerings? Her father might have bought it from him at a low price.

A knock on her door made her bundle the pouch into her desk before she went to open to the knocker. She was at once disturbed, for there was only one person in the house who knocked like that.

The Honorable James beckoned her outside. He

spoke without preface. "I wish you to know that the matter of your musical education is settled for the present. Indulge in no foolish ideas on that subject. I have invested your money so that, later on, you will have good returns. That is all."

"Invested!" she echoed. "The money for my studies?" Breath failed her, and she was unable to go on.

"You will not discuss this matter with my family, or I shall be compelled to—take measures."

Take measures,—that was what he said when he meant to be most difficult. He had trapped her between her love for Mrs. Chilton and her own need. But there was yet an avenue left.

He seemed to read her thought. "You may recall that Mr. Laird, our lawyer, is abroad for some months," he grated out. . . . "As I have acted for your interest, he will have nothing to say even if he were to be informed. I have acted in accordance with your father's wishes as expressed in his private letter to me. A girl's whim cannot move me."

He moved on, leaving her mute. She did not make an effort to ask what investment he had made. In the silence the door to her room slammed shut, moved by the draft from the street-door opening in the hall below. He peered down at her, his long upper lip twitching with inner amusement.

"Let me suggest that you place the door-stop on the pantry at Belleview," he said in his suavest tone. "It will be of great service. I noticed there was none on the door there," and he went on up-

ward, breathing hard through his nose, as was his habit when specially pleased. She could hear the whistling sound of his satisfaction until his own door shut it away from her.

Standing there, a swift conviction came to her.

" He has bought Belleview with my money. And cornered Mrs. Chilton so that she must sign away this house, so that he will have money to go on with for a year or so."

Then, just as swiftly, she felt mean and small. She was getting to be suspicious and intolerant. He would have received considerable money from the sale of the city house, and no doubt the country mansion was a bargain. Perhaps, after all, Mr. Chilton had done the best thing. Perhaps it would be far better, now that she was to be taken so far away from the studios, to look ahead. Next spring —" But I can't wait," she cried, in spite of herself. " I must go on. I must! "

Bob came, jumping up three steps at a time, and hailed her. " I've been over to Thompson's garage," he announced, " and I've got a car. She isn't much on style but I've got an idea for a gas-saving device and I can try it out with her, over there in the country. Say, aren't you glad we're going to be real dirt-farmers? We'll have heaps of fun, won't we? "

She could not deny him his happy moment. He did not notice the lack of enthusiasm in her reply but went on gaily.

" The Honorable has opened up,—I guess he feels sorry he was so nippy. He gave me twenty-five

round ones and said I could blow it to suit myself," he crowed. "I clinched the little bus over at Thompson's, and I'm going to run it out there to-morrow. Want to go?"

She shook her head. "I've got to go say good-bye to Mr. Capponi to-morrow," she said quietly. Then she laughed, "You'd better try your racer by yourself, Bobs. It might be too speedy for me."

"Ho, you think it isn't much!" he cried. "Just you wait and see. I'll make you all open your eyes, and when I get that gas-saver on her . . . oh *boy!*"

She went to her room with his jubilant voice in her ears. Some good had already come out of disaster,—perhaps more would follow. She must see what Mr. Capponi said about it. The wheel of things, as it turned, brought new aspects of the world each day.

"I won't show anyone the snuff-bottle and necklace; not anyone," she said to herself as she put the beaded pouch back in its place. "He'd hear of them somehow, and he'd want to take charge of them, or put them in the box at the bank. Father meant me to have them and do as I pleased with them, or he wouldn't have left them to me in this way; like a real birthday surprise."

CHAPTER III

THE WHEEL TURNS

ROSLYN'S spirits sank as they drove in between the high gates with the name *Belleview* carved upon them. The country had proved better than Bob's description of it, with its sweep of green valley hedged in with great humpy hills, and she had been prepared for a house to match. She wished Bob had not been so persistently silent about it. It would have been less of a shock.

"It *is* a mansion," she said aloud, as if someone had denied it. "It's perfectly enormous." She thought, "I'm glad it isn't mine, though."

"But it's hideous!" wailed Muriel. "Look at those jiggered-up towers and,—yes, I can count five gables on this side. It's one of those nightmares they used to consider stylish when Grandmother was young. A Mansard roof, too. Of all the jumbles!"

Mrs. Chilton was more practical. "It looks as if it would be hard to heat," she murmured. "I hope the chimneys are good."

Inside the grounds the drive became a smooth gravelled curve that swept to the house and around again to the entrance gates in a wide circle. All the shrubberies were on the eastern side of the lawn, so that they had a good view of the house as they approached. The porte-cochère, with its spiral iron

columns set on red brick pedestals, was guarded by two massive iron St. Bernard dogs with flower-baskets in their ponderous jaws. Muriel as she got out of the station bus wailed at the sight of them, and at the garish fountain where an iron swan spouted water from its open bill into a circular basin of green filigree iron and, just beyond the fountain, she was confronted by the steadfast eyes of two life-sized deer at gaze.

"The iron settees aren't bad, for they've come into fashion again," she said plaintively, as she followed her mother from the car, "but those horrid dogs and elks! I'd die of shame if the Harpers ever saw them. I hope no one comes to see us until those fearful things have been gotten rid of."

"I am more interested in finding out what sort of a piano is in the music-room," laughed Roslyn. "I hope it's as good as your fine Steinway, Mrs. Chilton. That had a glorious tone. I hope the man to whom Mr. Chilton sold it loves it like I did."

A series of loud reports made them turn. "Bob is coming," cried Muriel, and they all laughed; even the taxi-driver, standing beside his car.

Bob's ancient machine came flying up the drive to the tune of its own making with Maggie's green coat-tail like a banner on one side and Bob's traps bulging out the other. It ground to a halt just in time to avoid crashing into the taxi, and Maggie was flung forward into the arms of the chauffeur, who stood her on her feet and picked up her hat which had been bumped from her head.

"Sure, you come like the angel Gabriel, wid

trumpets, ma'am," he said to her and she grinned up at him, with both hands straightening her crumpled hat, while Bob, as he flung Maggie's baggage out upon the drive, was explaining that the old bus had made it in four minutes less than the last trip.

"She's easy to unload, too," he declared loudly to the man. "Give me a car without a lot of foolery, like doors and glass tops, and all that."

Roslyn had been busy with her own bags and even Mrs. Chilton had helped unload the taxi of their luggage, but as Maggie began gathering up the odd assortment of bundles that she had brought out with her, the taxi-driver sprang to her assistance, with a cheery, "Don't destroy yourself, ma'am,—let me assist ye."

Muriel nudged Roslyn as they went to the front-door which Mrs. Chilton had opened with a key. "Love at first sight," she murmured. "Isn't it romantic?" Muriel was rather sentimental about such things.

"I hope he lives in the neighborhood," Roslyn answered under her breath. "She doesn't like the country, you know——"

Bob with his suitcases bumped into them from behind. "Step lively, please," he shouted. "I'm starved, and I've got to rustle over to the village for groceries before we can eat. I'll fling my duds up there in the hall, Mums, until I come back. Tell me what you want, won't you? I'd like to race that heavy freight," nodding back toward the taxi, "as far as the station."

He dumped his belongings on the floor at the top of the stair and came flying down. "Hey, Maggie, tell that Irish Ralph de Palma to wait. I've some business with him," he called out at the door.

Mrs. Chilton had laid her bag upon the central table of the open reception-hall and, with a pencil and scrap of paper, was making a list. Her gracious calm surmounted even the turmoil of arrival. She handed him the paper, with a crinkle at the corners of her eyes.

"Don't try to race anyone back," she advised, gently. "We'd like these eggs and the milk-bottles in the original packages."

Muriel and Roslyn were opening doors and poking about on the first floor. Roslyn found the music-room, a pleasant bare room at the side of the house, and tried the piano. "It's an antique, for sure," she called to Muriel. "Half the keys stick. But it will be all right, I guess, when the house is warmed up."

Muriel was more interested in the other rooms. "The place isn't bad," she conceded. "The furniture is old-fashioned but good. It will go pretty well with our own stuff. Mother, where are we to put our things? Do let's go up and choose our rooms."

Mrs. Chilton smiled at her enthusiasm. "Go along up and take any room you like, in this part of the house," she said. "I must see what sort of kitchen there is, and set Maggie to getting some kind of a meal. We have enough food with us,

fortunately, to make a lunch, even if Bob loses half of his load."

Roslyn paused, bags in hand. "But we might choose the wrong rooms," she suggested. She would not mention the Honorable James.

"Mr. Chilton told me that he had selected his rooms," returned his wife quietly. "He has also reserved one for me. You can hardly make a mistake."

Muriel looked at the row of doors on either side of the long main hall. "They all have poles and curtain rings, as if they used to have curtains to the doors," she commented. "I think it's a good idea. Let's get Mother to give us some of our silk hangings for our doors. It makes a bedroom so private, even when the door is open."

Roslyn found all the doors on the south side of the upper hall closed. Mr. Chilton had chosen a whole suite. She called to Muriel, who was on the other side of the house, but Muriel had found a place that suited her and was calling her to come see it.

"The tower room," she said, with a wave of her hand about the commodious octagonal chamber. "Isn't it romantic? I can imagine I am an enchanted princess. See how pretty the lawns look from here. That's a nice little white house down there beyond the trees. It looks as if it were on our place. I wonder we didn't see it when we came in."

Roslyn approved the room, glanced at the little house cuddling among the yellowing poplar trees, and then turned again on her own search. "I'm

going to find a spot that carries out the name of the place,—Belleview. You can see only the shrubbery and lawns here. It's cosy but I want to see the mountains."

Muriel laughed. "Run along, my dear," she said, gaily. "I'll park my bags and then see if there's anything I can do downstairs. Mother is simply dead, and Maggie gets bewildered outside her own kitchen."

Roslyn found no room where she could see the mountains. One had a pine tree in front of it and two others were obscured by the group of tall thick Norway maples on the side-lawn. She went up another flight of stairs, still carrying her bags, and there on the third floor she found what she wanted. She loved it as soon as she stepped into it. It was wide and low-ceiled, with two large windows peaking out in an odd angle that gave two views of the hills beyond, one to the east and one to the west. She flung the west casement open and leaned out.

Beyond the Belleview lawns the green valley dropped away in a wide cradle, where an old, old stone-walled graveyard lay at rest, and then the sweep of fertile land, climbing suddenly, rose to the wooded edge of a small wedge-like mountain, with the other ranges of hills standing back, like guardians of its solitude. It glowed now in the long rays of the slanting sun, and the reaching shadows crept higher as the tide of time flooded on toward night.

"That must be Fortune Hill," she said, remembering Bob's account of his day here last week. "Fortune Hill . . . it's a good name."

As she stood there, her thoughts went back over the last few days, with their unexpected twists and turns of fate. Miss Sarah had left as she had declared she would, but she went with regret, weeping a little and insisting that dear Margaret come often to see her in her new home that was really her old one, for she was going back to her little house in Clinton which had fallen vacant at just this time. "If you ever want to make me a long visit, I shall be awaiting you with the utmost pleasure," she had said in her ceremonious way. "I shall write or possibly pay you a visit when the Ogre is absent." Roslyn had admired her spirit: she knew Miss Sarah would never bend before the Honorable James.

So much had happened, and so much had passed. Capponi's tears of rage at his own helplessness and his promise to keep in touch with her; Mr. Chilton's urbanity on all the occasions when she had seen him; her own unexplained decision to do nothing with her treasures until she should see what Belleview held for her,—all these were part of yesterday. The only thing she had gathered out of them, was her grim determination to stick to her music. Beyond that she did not go for the present. Under her breath she murmured:

"Nothing is impossible . . . no . . . I shall wait . . ."

Then Muriel's voice came up to her. "Come along down, Roslyn. We've found the loveliest old tablecloth. All embroidered! It's Chinese, and we want you to tell us about it."

Mrs. Chilton and Muriel were in the reception-

hall, with the tablecloth between them, hung like a banner for her inspection. "I think it must be the work of an amateur," suggested Mrs. Chilton. "It is done in the Chinese manner but it looks odd to me. We found it behind the top drawer of the pantry."

It was a yellowed linen, with a design of daffodils in natural colors such as used to be popular for table use. It was well executed but, apart from the general grouping, was not oriental in design. Roslyn puckered her brows over it, until she discovered some small lettering in the lower corner.

"There's a name among the leaves there," she pointed out. "It's—yes, it's Clara. You must be right, Mrs. Chilton. Someone did it who only copied the Chinese method."

"And signed her name to it," supplemented Muriel. "Clara who, I wonder?"

None of them could answer that question, and then they heard Bob's fiery chariot and the tablecloth was put away. There was so much to do and they were so tired that no more thought was given it. It lay in the drawer of the center-table forgotten for the time.

Mr. James Chilton was not to arrive until the eighth day after the moving had taken place, for he disliked turmoil and disorder: it grated on his nerves, he said. In that short week they all worked like slaves; floors were polished, pictures and mirrors hung, furniture arranged, and all the door and window curtains in their places; even the silk hangings which Muriel had begged her mother for the bed-

room doors were on their poles in the main hall though the rest of the bedrooms, Roslyn's, Bob's and the guest-chamber in the wing, were not yet furnished with them. Roslyn worked as hard as the rest, for in the bustle and hurry, she tried to dull the first sharp edge of her disappointment about her lessons with Loring.

Bob was perfectly happy in the old wash-house, the only picturesque thing left about the place when the late Senator Bruce tore down and remodelled the farmhouse of the old pioneer, Bell. Here was a large stove, a carpenter's bench, an incredibly ugly wooden rocker, and some stools in varying stages of decay. He dragged Roslyn over to see his workshop on the fourth day, after he had all his arrangements completed.

"I've found an old forge and anvil and I'm going to make the most of the time I am here," he told her with high glee. "I bet I'll turn out something from here that will break the record. See, I can make the steel thing-a-ma-jig for my gas-saver here. I tell you, Miss Roslyn Blake, it's the best thing that ever happened to me. By the way, Miss, I'm coming up to put that door-stop on for you today. That was a present to you; not to the family."

She laughed at his earnestness. "All right, Bobby," she responded. "Any time you please, but I'll be busy upstairs all the afternoon. We are going to pack away the summer things up in the cedar-room on the fourth floor."

He nodded and turned to his tools. The sight of them lured him too strongly to be refused. "I'll

be up sometime after lunch," he said absently and she left him deep in preparations for his smithy work.

The afternoon sped rapidly up under the raftered roof, with Muriel and Mrs. Chilton packing superfluous things in chests and boxes. It was amazing how many such things they had accumulated in the past six months. Mrs. Chilton declared that she was positive she had thrown out or given away everything that was not absolutely necessary when they moved into the town house, and here she had dozens of articles that must be taken care of for the winter. It was found that there was no wrapping paper and Muriel volunteered to go into the village for it. Then the plumber came to see about the pipes and Mrs. Chilton had to go down.

Roslyn lingered alone, held by the curiosity that attacks people in a strange attic. There were dark spaces under the rafters and dim nooks by the chimneys that might hide secrets. She stooped and peered about and was rewarded by finding a sort of cubbyhole by the west gable; a square hole in the flooring about six inches in extent. She put her hand into the opening, not expecting to find anything, but at once her fingers came in contact with a cloth-covered oblong; an old book. She pulled it out with some difficulty, for it was a tight fit, and saw a paper flutter out into the hole.

The late Senator Bruce's lost bank-notes flashed across her mind and she groped in the hole with a will. How marvellous if she should find even one of the missing notes! The paper had disappeared.

however, and she drew her hand out, with only a coating of dust to repay her efforts. Then she laughed at herself for being so silly.

"Of course, everyone knew everything about every spot in this house," she told herself. "After a tragedy like that, people leave nothing to chance," and she pictured the searchers, one after another, finding this hiding-place and thrilling to the same wild hope that had stirred her.

The book she had found was an old Psalter, in German, with its edges worn and its paper crinkled with time and disuse. It had been printed by Michael Bilmeyer in Germantown in 1810. Evidently no one had thought it worth taking. She tucked it under her arm and went to her room, where she examined it in the full daylight. The title page had a line of faint, faded writing across its top margin,—"Malcolm Bruce, his book," and under this, in a boyish hand, "This is my book and when I am done with it, I don't care who has it. Signed May 12', 1876, Alexander Bruce."

"Senator Bruce's book when he was a boy," she thought. "I wonder what the paper could have been? Perhaps a Bible lesson. They went to church a lot then. No, he must have used it as a lesson book and that was an exercise in German."

She slipped it in her dresser drawer, meaning to show it to Mrs. Chilton after she had washed her hands, but just as she had finished making herself tidy, Maggie came toiling up to call her downstairs.

"They's a lady axin' fer the Madam," she said, in

a louder tone than necessary. "She's a rare queer one. I was betwixt doubt and fear, lest she be one of them hold-up ladies, though she looks over-meek fer the same."

"Hush, Maggie, or she'll hear you," warned Roslyn, as she hurried down to the floor below. "Did she say what she wanted?" she asked in a low tone.

"That she did not," affirmed Maggie in a penetrating whisper. "She jis' kep' axin' who was in, after I told her I couldn't find the Madam. She's got a sort of goat's look,—sly and smilin' . . ."

Roslyn made a gesture of silence and ran down to the reception-hall. She felt certain that anyone waiting there could have heard Maggie's unflattering comments. A figure rose to greet her and she saw a slim, willowy lady in deep violet, with a hat of the same hue that overshadowed her face.

"I can assure you I am not a female gun-man," the lady said, with a reassuring laugh. "I am your neighbor,—in the little lodge," and she made a gesture in the direction of the east lawns. "What a perfect darling of a maid,—so unspoiled by affectation. I should like to steal her from you. I adore the primitive."

Roslyn laughed as she took the offered hand. "Maggie would be glad to know that you liked her ways," she replied. "Mrs. Chilton sometimes despairs of her. But I am sorry Mrs. Chilton is not here. She must have gone——"

A series of bumpings and knockings in the cellar below broke in on her, and she exclaimed, "She

must be down there with the plumber. I will tell her that you are here."

"By no means," interposed the other. "I can wait. I want to get acquainted with you, for I have heard that you have lived a perfect nomad's life, in deserts and jungles and all that."

Roslyn opened her eyes. "Who told you? How could anyone know?"

"My dear Miss Blake,"—she knew her name,—"all things are known in a village. Though you cloak yourself with silence, they know all. I imagine that they have even tried to fathom the depths of my secret story."

Roslyn thought she must be an actress or a bit eccentric; her manner was so odd. She liked her, though. She liked the narrow, lined face with its great violet eyes and its drooping mouth and the way she wore her unusual garments. She thought, "She may be queer but she's nice."

"I forgot to announce myself," the visitor said, drawing out a card to lay on the table. "I am Amanda Bump; a preposterous name which I have never succeeded in living down. I am thankful, though, that they did not christen me Clytemnestra," and she laughed in sudden hearty fashion, that was entirely natural and pleasing.

Roslyn murmured something about one never liking one's own name.

"I had intended to keep my rule of absolute seclusion," Miss Bump went on, with a return to her more mysterious manner. "But I saw that sweet girl, Miss Chilton, pass my door this morn-

ing, and my resolve was broken. I have come to invite, to *insist* that you all have a cup of tea with me on Wednesday afternoon."

A door slammed in the back regions and the plumber's voice could be heard, promising to return in an hour. Mrs. Chilton came quickly into the hall, with a smiling apology for her absence. Miss Bump was introduced and the invitation tendered. Roslyn thought she saw reluctance in Mrs. Chilton's gracious acceptance but Miss Bump was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice it.

"Alas, what we have seen pass before us here," she said as she rose to take her leave. "I was not here when the Bruces lived here, of course, but I live in my imagination and I have suffered in their troubles. You know there was a daughter?" she asked, in her other, brisker manner.

"We really know nothing of them," Mrs. Chilton murmured.

"A daughter Clara who married a Chinaman. She met him in Washington, where he was an attaché, or secretary, or something. It was an ideal match. She went to Hong Kong and was rapturously happy,—a true romance. She must have died before her broken-hearted mother passed to her heavenly rest, for no word ever came from her after the first year. I can fancy how her lover-husband must have grieved, perhaps died of her loss." She added briskly, "Do come early on Wednesday. The days are shorter now. September is here."

Roslyn hoped there would be some talk of the

Bruces but nothing further was said of them. Miss Bump was full of Old Home Week and the Ball that was to come off next week. After she had gone Mrs. Chilton gave an exclamation. "I have it at last," she said. "I've been wondering where I heard the name. Amanda Bump, who wrote 'Hearts Aflame.' Don't you remember, Roslyn, how Annie, the waitress, devoured her books? And Maggie thought she was a lady bandit! That shows how much an author's name counts with them."

Muriel caught the words as she came in through the back hall, and was thrilled, as she said, to know they had such a distinguished author as a neighbor. She was enchanted to learn they were to have tea with her in her little house. Bob, very black and smutty, in search of a bolt he had left in his room, was of the opposite opinion.

"No, sir, you don't get me to go," he declared. "She'd be putting me in a book as a stalwart hero. Besides, I'm busy. I've got the forge working fine and I'm going to make that pair of candle-stands for you, Mums, as soon as I finish the gas-saver."

Muriel looked after him with a sigh. "He seems to have gone wild out here," she said. "One invention after another, and we've only been here four days."

Mrs. Chilton held up her hand. "Hark, someone is coming," she said, and they all listened. The sound of a car stopping at the porch and heavy feet on the steps came to them.

"And those horrid iron dogs are still there," breathed Muriel.

"It's someone from the village," said Roslyn, who had caught a glimpse through the window of three masculine figures. "One looks like the postmaster——"

Mrs. Chilton motioned Muriel to answer the bell, and Roslyn began to move away, but curiosity dragged at her feet. She heard the deep tones asking for Mr. or Mrs. Chilton, and saw the three men enter.

Mr. Hopkins, the postmaster, a tall, thin, dyspeptic man in a light grey overcoat, introduced the trio without much ceremony but with genial ease. Having been postmaster for ten years he was not stiff with strangers.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Chilton. I hope we're not intruding, but the fact is, we've come on a pretty urgent errand. Mr. Meyer here," and he indicated the ruddy hotel-keeper, "has got a problem on his hands, and we're sort of hoping that you can help him out. In fact, it's a sort of favor to the whole town . . ."

"No, no." Mr. Meyer, a fat Mennonite farmer who had taken the ramshackle tavern to cover a bad debt, shook his head. "Not chust a favior, neither. He sayed he'd pay good. But he's got to hev a bathroom, you see. And there ain't none in the *ho*-tel yit. I wuz studdyin' to git one in next year——"

Mr. Binns, the justice of the peace, interrupted him. "The point is this, Mrs. Chilton," he said in a smooth official voice. "A communication has come from a gentleman, an Oxford student, who is com-

ing to study—to study,—well he wants to locate here for a week or so. He wired for accommodations but our friend Meyer cannot take him, for he insisted on a private bath. We heard that you had lived in China for some years, and we knew you had an abundance of bathrooms. As a member of the Belleview Boosters, we want this distinguished gentleman to come here. And we ask, as a patriotic act, if you will co-operate with us in the matter."

"You want us to take him?" exclaimed Mrs. Chilton. "But I have never been in China, and I don't know what Mr. Chilton would think of it." She was actually in a flurry. She so hated to refuse anyone, and yet this was impossible. She said: "I am afraid it is impossible, gentlemen. My husband——"

"May we be entrusted with that matter?" Mr. Binns took the words from her. "Mr. Hopkins, you have the city address that Mr. Chilton left with you. We can get in touch with him at once. Thank you, Mrs. Chilton, you are a public spirited citizen. . . . The Ball we are getting up for Old Home Week will be an occasion to show the distinguished stranger and your household our appreciation. Good afternoon, good afternoon. Come, Hopkins, we must lose no time. Jonesville might get wind of this and invite him over there,—that new hotel there has set them up above their boots."

They were on the porch before he halted and put his head in at the door.

"His name, Mrs. Chilton, is Wong,—W. B. Wong. He is a young man,—a nobleman, I gathered. I

forgot to say we telephoned him at the Biltmore in New York, and promised him the rooms by Thursday, at the latest."

The door closed firmly and the automobile snorted. Mrs. Chilton looked at the two girls. "A Chinaman, to *board* here," she murmured, and then rallied. "But your father would never allow it," she said to Muriel. "It is quite impossible."

Her daughter looked slightly disappointed. "It might be fun," she remarked. "If he's a nobleman . . . tell us what they are really like, Roslyn. You must have seen plenty of them."

Mrs. Chilton went toward the stair. "I am sorry to seem disobliging,—and about a public matter,—but it is impossible."

CHAPTER IV

WELCOME TO BELLEVIEW

Miss Bump's little house was lovely. Roslyn's eyes lighted hungrily on the inlaid baby-grand piano, and their hostess caught the look.

"Isn't it a darling?" she murmured. "And it is doubly dear because it came from an unexpected source." She smiled and sighed and changed the subject, but later Muriel told Roslyn that the authoress had confessed the piano had been bought with some of the proceeds of "A Young Girl's Love" which had gone better than hoped. "You must play me something some day. I adore music; those dark Russian things with crashing emotions. But now we will get acquainted. Let us nestle down in the boudoir, and talk."

The boudoir was a pretty sitting-room, where tea-things were already laid on a low octagonal table. It was easy to be sociable with Miss Bump, who was always forgetting her mysterious manner to be amusing and frank with them. She told them all about herself, in spite of the secret at which she had hinted during her call. She was thirty-eight, had been born in New England, and had taken to literature early in her school days. At first, it had not paid but as soon as she got the knack of spinning tales of lovely girls who were adored by tall, strong

men, her stories began to bring in money. She was very well off and making more every year.

She took the burden of chat upon herself so well that they had little to do save agree and accept the delicious tea-cakes and chocolate that she served them. When the hour was over, she found it hard to let them go.

"There is no one in the village for me," she said, plaintively. "And I hunger for kindred souls. I have consented to go to the Ball since I have seen you dear people."

Roslyn felt embarrassed by such open reference to the soul. She did not know whether her own was really the sort Miss Bump thought it was.

As they went along the path to the mansion, they were all in good spirits, and were chattering together happily. Mrs. Chilton in particular was filled with pleasant anticipations of their future in Belleview.

"The house is comfortable, now that it is in order," she said. "And the country is really beautiful——"

She broke off so abruptly that Roslyn swung about to see what had wiped the words from her lips. Mr. Chilton, with his brows pulled together, was walking rapidly toward them. He must have dismissed the taxi at the gate, to make an impression.

"Why, James," exclaimed his wife recovering her cheerfulness at once. "We did not expect you until later. How did you come over from the station? You surely never walked." Roslyn could not see how she could be so easily duped.

"A small matter of two miles is nothing to speak of," he returned sharply. "I am not one to idle about when there is business to be done. I have been busy in town, very busy," and his look accused them of idleness. "If it had not been for our guests, I should have stayed another day."

"Our guests?" echoed his wife and daughter in one breath. "Who ——"

"The young nobleman from Hunan," he replied, enjoying their surprise. "The mandarin Wong and his servant. He will arrive to-morrow morning. It is arranged." He inhaled the air through his long nose and breathed it out in deep whistling breaths. When no word was said, he moved forward, still breathing loudly. "I shall enjoy his cultured society. It is long since I entertained gentlemen of his type." He halted, to throw back over his shoulder, "We will put him in the south suite. I talked with Dr. Briggs on the train, and he tells me that Senator Bruce died in those apartments, of an apoplectic stroke brought on by the loss of his last nest-egg. He had been in ill-health and the loss was too much for him. Dr. Briggs was with him at the last. So much for village gossip. But I prefer other chambers. I shall take the north wing," and he went on more quickly ahead of them, while they followed at a slower and slower pace.

All three fell into stricken silence. It had been one thing to joke about it, but to have a stranger, an Oriental, dropped into their family life without warning, on the heels of a moving, was another matter.

"I shall have to speak to Maggie," murmured Mrs. Chilton. "So much must be arranged. A mandarin! With a servant, too."

Roslyn started to go upstairs but the sound of Maggie's voice halted her. Mr. Chilton stalked out of the back-hall in wrathful majesty and brushed past Roslyn as he mounted the stairs. He had evidently been swift in breaking the news to the maid, for in the minute that he had preceded them, Maggie had got the bare facts.

"Indeed and indeed, I'll not credit it," she said loudly as she came from the pantry-door. "A heathen Chinee in this house? No, it's not in nature."

Mrs. Chilton under her breath sighed, "If he had only left it to me," before she spoke aloud to the excited Maggie. "The gentleman who is coming has lived in England, he may even have been to Ireland, and he is an educated ——"

"But and is he a Chinee?" demanded Maggie beyond herself with indignation. "Ah, I see by your looks he is that. And then I give up me job. When it comes to cookin' rice and bird-nests and rats for a nasty heathen, I'm showin' you the back of my hand."

"Maggie," Mrs. Chilton's voice was grave. "You forget yourself. This Mr. Wong is ——"

"A yeller Chinee, and pig-tails is not to me taste," Maggie was suddenly brazen. "You may cook rats fer him all you like, Mrs. Chilton, ma'am. I'll be leavin' the morn's morn."

"Then I think, Maggie," said Mrs. Chilton

gently, "that you had better go at once. You can probably get to your aunt's before dark——"

"Yes, and have a fine sittyation fer the axin'," Maggie broke in again. "I was refusin' a waitress place in the house where Tim Coogan boards, but now I'll whip off to it, thanks to the Chinee . . ." and she flounced off to the kitchen regions, muttering impudences as she went.

Muriel was going to be indignant when her mother interposed. "She was bound to go, my dear. I saw she had a letter from Jonesville yesterday and she confessed it was from that Irish chauffeur. People like Maggie make easy friendships. The question now, is to get someone else. We must have someone."

Muriel had an inspiration. "Let Roslyn run over and ask Miss Bump. She knows all the people for miles around, and she's awfully kind."

Roslyn found Miss Bump still standing on her tiny porch, picking dead leaves off her geraniums,—so short a time had elapsed since they had left her. She was interested at once.

"Yes, I know just the girl for you," she said. "She lives in the house down the road a bit. She's the cousin of my Mary Weiss and she is a jewel. I should have had her myself but for her name,—Gladys Clunk. Can you imagine it! Gladys Clunk and Amanda Bump. No, it was too much. Wait, I'll go down with you."

She put on a floppy white hat and they started. "Gladys is really well-trained," she said, in her briskest manner. "She was brought up with a

family over in Weston, a judge's family. So she knows civilized society."

Gladys Clunk was eighteen, black-haired and plump. The short skirt of her pink frock did not cover her dimpled knees, and she wore a huge spit-curl over each little pink ear. She was good-natured and willing to step into the breach at once.

"Sure I'll come," she said, eyeing Roslyn's simple dress with approval. "I guess anyone in Belleview 'ud do the same. We ain't goin' to have them Jonesvillers sayin' we can't put on style for a Lordship. My goodness, I'd work all night to put it over Jonesville, even if it is for a chink. I'll get some duds and tell Mom. 'Twon't take me a minute."

In the interval while they waited, Miss Bump nodded to Roslyn. "She'll do it. Whatever Gladys promises is as good as done," and she glanced at the mail-car as it passed. "I see the mail is in," she observed. "I am expecting important letters, so I'll leave you. Come to me whenever you need advice on the villagers; I know them to their heart's core."

Roslyn was grateful and said so. She could not help thinking, though, that the amiable writer dwelt a good deal on the emotional side of people, hearts and souls and all that. Gladys Clunk was a substantial proof that she really did know the character, at least, of those about her, for the smiling girl, though she chattered a good deal about the Ball and the Palace movie shows, was serious enough when she was turned over to Mrs. Chilton. Roslyn could hear her voice and Mrs. Chilton's as the two went

out to the kitchen precincts. "She's going to be a lot better than that stupid Maggie," she thought.

As she looked out over the valley from her nest in the window-nook, she felt a certain sense of fulfilment stealing over her. Somehow she was sure that things were going to be well with her. The burden which Mr. Chilton had forced upon the household might not turn out so badly. Mr. Chilton would allow them to go to the Ball, and that would be great fun. She had never seen an Old Home Week celebration. She wondered if the visitor would wear his Chinese robes, as Gladys declared Mr. Hopkins in the interview over the 'phone had requested him to do.

"Perhaps I can show the snuff-bottle and get an idea of what it is worth," she thought. "I don't know about the necklace. I suppose I ought to keep it until I know more about it. If Father had only been able to tell me. It's hard to know whether he meant me to——"

"Oh, here you are," said Muriel in her ear. "I've been looking for you. Bob brought some letters." She spoke in a low voice, as if afraid of being overheard. "I had one from Aunt Sarah. She says she wants me to find out if Father is going away any time soon. She has a friend who would like to see our old inlaid fire-screens; those little ones they used like fans to keep the fire from their faces, you know. Dear me, I don't know what to tell her. We never know when he is going away. He just goes."

"You're not going to sell——" began Roslyn, for her mind was full of that idea.

"Oh, no," Muriel was shocked. "She says her friend just wants to see them. Perhaps," she added with a flash of intuition, "they want to copy them. I don't think Mother would like that."

"Write her that you don't ever know when he will be away," Roslyn suggested. And then she had her turn for foreboding. "I do hope she isn't selling her nice old things. She never would unless she needed the money."

"I don't think so," Muriel was confident. "Aunt Sarah always had a lot of up-to-date friends, exactly opposite to herself. It's probably all right to tell her that I'll send her word if Father does go on a trip?"

She made a question of it. Roslyn nodded. "What's the other envelope?"

Muriel laughed. "It's for you. I got mine and opened it, so I know. The invitation for the Ball next week. Aren't they grand, with the big seal in gold and the names of the patronesses!" She peered over Roslyn's shoulder to see the imposing card. "See, Miss Bump's name is there. It will be fun. I do hope the Chinaman has one of those gorgeous silk robes. Do you think he will be able to dance? Gladys told me,—she was in the hall when Bob came in,—that she heard Mr. Hopkins say they were going to ask him to lead the Grand March. So they'll stay over Sunday; perhaps longer."

"I wonder why he is coming here of all places?" Roslyn said, with a pucker in her brow. "Belleview is such a tiny place."

"Mr. Hopkins thinks it's the center of the universe," laughed Muriel. "He considers it the most natural thing in the world. But it is odd. He must be here on some secret mission. Chinamen are mysterious people. Perhaps he is looking for some stolen jewels; they do that in the detective stories. I'll rush down and write a line to Aunt Sarah, so Bob can take it before dinner. Do you know that boy has actually made one candle-stand already? I never knew him to work so fast."

Roslyn dropped down on her knees by the window again, with her eyes on the clear September sky, tinted with the last flare of the afterglow. Stolen jewels,—the words stuck in her mind. Absurd, of course, yet had not her father said the necklace came to him in an odd way? She made a swift picture of a robbery in a Hunan palace, the thief fleeing to America, disposing of part of his treasure, which was afterward sold to a man who in turn sold it to her father. Why not? It did not follow that her father was in the least to blame. He might have been told some pathetic story . . .

The dinner-gong called her away from her fantastic thoughts and she ran downstairs, rather glad to be recalled to normal life. Gladys Clunk in her apron and cap looked like a maid who had stepped off the stage; her eyes were so large and black-lashed, and her mouth so red, and her two big spit-curls above each ear were such perfect spirals.

"She's more ornamental than Maggie, thank goodness," whispered Muriel in Gladys' first brief absence in quest of the mustard. "We're lucky."

Bob, who had washed too hastily, grunted out unexpectedly, "She's got a lot of nerve. Told me, as I came through the back-hall, that she was going into the movies later on, but she was crazy to come here, because she wanted to talk to a live Chinese lord . . ." He broke off, as Gladys re-entered with the mustard.

She must have heard him but she gave no sign. Mr. Chilton came into the room and she served him with such an air of deep respect that he actually smiled on her. A warm human kindliness seemed to emanate from her as she moved about; each one felt it and responded to it. The dinner was unexpectedly sociable and free from restraint. They talked of the coming guest and of the Ball, of Bob's romping racer, and many other things, and there was no bitterness in their hearts. It seemed as if the wholesome presence of Gladys Clunk had worked happy magic among them. The Honorable James unbent so far as to promise Roslyn lessons in Paris—some day.

The next morning Roslyn waked with the same sense of freedom. This was to be an exciting day. The visitor from the other side of the world was to arrive. He was to come on the eleven o'clock train and be escorted to Belleview House,—though he did not know this,—by the postmaster, the justice of the peace, the lawyer, the fire-chief and the traffic cop from the Cross-roads below the village,—this last person pressed into service by the chairman of the Committee of Welcome for the sake of his uniform.

Gladys Clunk was beside herself with delight. To

be in the center of important events was heaven to her. "Do you s'pose he'll eat with chop-sticks?" She put the question with round, innocent eyes. "Say, ain't it funny how they can see out of them slanty eyes? Sorta cross-eyed, they seem to me. There was a chink laundryman here last year, and he smoked opium. Do you s'pose he'll smoke opium?"

It was barely half-past ten when Bob came rushing in, with his eyes alight. "There's an airplane landing down in the Fair Grounds!" he cried. "Someone's getting out! Come and see."

Mrs. Chilton, Muriel and Roslyn crowded to the kitchen doorway, while Gladys flew to the laundry window and was out on the back porch in a trice. "Gee!" she cried. "Look at the crowd! They're runnin' to beat Father Time!"

The crowd which had been gradually drifting to the Cross-roads to meet Burgess Beerbower's car as it should come from the station turned and got into action at sight of the plane and the field around the plane was at once a black mass. "I didn't dream there were so many people in Belleview," exclaimed Muriel.

"Ain't." Gladys kept her eyes glued on the black ants down in the Fair Grounds. "Half of Jonesville and all township's here. It's a grand event, I tell *you!*"

They waited, breathless, while the throng surged and eddied away from the plane, which, after a short interval, began its dash across the open space to rise in graceful fashion above the scrub-oaks of

the adjoining thicket. As soon as it was free of the ground, the crowd flowed back again to the small group by the entrance. It was plain that the stranger was there. After a moment, Bob pointed out a shining black speck that he declared was a high hat.

"It's Hopkins," Gladys affirmed. "He's got the style. He was goin' to Ireland last winter and he got him that silk hat to go call on Cosgrove. He says he's in luck to have some use out of it. Ah-h, here they come!"

The crowd came through the entrance of the grounds, poured into the open road, disappeared around the group of buildings at the corner, passed the gas-station and emerged on the macadam road, in plain sight.

"That's him!" shrieked Gladys, pointing a plump finger. "My, ain't he an old bird! He looks near a hundred. And they said he was young!"

Even in the excitement of the moment, Roslyn wanted to laugh at the disappointment on the pink face. Evidently Gladys had been making up romantic pictures of the Chinese lord. She herself felt a tinge of dismay at the small withered man in dark, correct clothes, who was escorted up the road by the entire phalanx of local worthies, each trying to make himself heard above the others.

"Come," said Mrs. Chilton, "we must not stay gaping here. Muriel, tell your father Mr. Wong has arrived ahead of time. Hurry, Roslyn, change your dress, for they will be here at once. How fortunate that Muriel and I are ready . . ."

CHAPTER V

FROM THE ORIENT

THE crowd came up as far as the porte-cochère and hung there, while the Committee of Welcome, which had got wind of the arrival and had returned, swept the small, withered gentleman in the dark grey hat and coat up to the open front-door, where the Honorable James was waiting in majesty.

Mr. Hopkins, by reason of his loud clear voice, introduced the stranger. "The Lord Wong, Mr. Chilton," he announced, with a graceful sweep of the shining silk hat he held in his hand. "The distinguished visitor from ——"

The withered little gentleman held up a hand. "Please, please," he said, "I have been trying to understand . . . it is gratifying . . . but ——"

"It is your just due," shouted Fred Dillon, the fire-chief. "Your just due and we'll see you get it." He had read the phrase,—*your just due*—in the Fire Report that morning and liked it.

"But," persisted the yellow-skinned gentleman, winking his oblique eyes very fast, "it is not my due. For I am not Wong. I am Han. I have come to seek Mr. Wong."

The Committee fell back. Murmurs of "Gosh" and "Dang it" and "Can you beat it?" culminated in a single chorus, "Where *is* Wong?" and there was confusion and the sound of many voices.

Mr. Chilton saved the stranger from further embarrassment. He waved the Committee back with a fine gesture then ushered Mr. Han into the hall, while with the other hand he swung the door upon its hinges, shutting out the sounds of discontent.

"A little mistake, Mr. Han," he said grandly. "To be too eager is to lay oneself open to such mistakes. May I ask you to be seated, while you unbosom yourself in regard to your quest of Mr. Wong? Is he, by any chance, an emissary of your distinguished government?"

"By no means, by no means," interrupted the small gentleman with an air of exquisite denial. "He is a very dear friend. I desire to enjoy his company." He hesitated for the fraction of a second. "I may as well tell you, sir, that I am an old friend of his family, traveling with him, and, being immersed in my researches in the British Museum, I missed the boat on which he sailed. Hence my hasty entrance on the air-boat. But he is not yet here." He appeared downcast.

"Have no fear on that score," interrupted Mr. Chilton, pompously. "He is to arrive,—in fact," he broke off, "he must have arrived by this time. He was expected on the eleven o'clock train. The Committee were gathering at the station to welcome him when——" he interrupted himself again. "Pardon me for a moment," he said. "My family will explain," and he strode to the door, which he flung open. "Mr. Hopkins!" he called loudly.

The Committee were going down the drive, arguing with one another, but the postmaster turned,

with a hand to his ear to catch what Mr. Chilton shouted after him, and answered in the same tone.

"Lem Bradley sent his Jim over on his bicycle just now to say that he didn't come on the train," he roared back. "Tell him, Jim. We're going back to wait for the eleven-fifty."

Jim Bradley, a freckled lad, came up to the bottom of the steps. He called up to Mr. Chilton in his cracking treble: "Nobody come on the eleven but a fresh drummer from New York. He tried to pester Dad about where he could get accommodations but Dad had to take a telegram and I bumped him off good and proper. Buttin' in like that . . ." and Jim's scorn of the unimportant salesman was fine to see. "I'm goin' back and when he comes, I'll lope right up and tell you. Don't want no more mistakes this time."

He was off, pedalling down the drive, puffed with a sense of his services to the principals in this crisis. Mr. Chilton came back to them where they stood listening to the brief dialogue.

"That much is settled," he said with satisfaction. "We will not again disturb you, Mr. Han. We have twenty minutes for introductions and a little chat."

Roslyn, when her turn came, was introduced as having spent some months in China and Mr. Han beamed at her through his great horn-rimmed spectacles, which he had put on the better to see them all. "I trust you did not entirely despise my inconspicuous country," he said, falling into the manner of speech of his native land. "You visited the coast

cities, no doubt, and found them not so progressive as your own fine towns?"

She was a little embarrassed by having to pass judgment before them all. "I only saw Peking," she said. "We were only there two months. My father loved the Chinese interior districts——"

"Yes, yes, of course," interrupted the Honorable James, impatiently. "An archæologist, of course . . . but I should like to inquire, Mr. Han, if you are staying over, when Mr. Wong arrives? We should be charmed to have you as our own personal guest for that period."

Roslyn saw Mrs. Chilton flush but she was ready to support her husband. "We have so many vacant rooms," she said quickly, "that it will be quite a benefit to put one in use for you, Mr. Han."

Roslyn thought this was putting it too strong until she saw how it pleased the small withered gentleman. He bowed deeply and his nut-colored face wrinkled into gratified smiles. "It is too great an honor for such a despicable person, but it would be a fragrant memory to me for the rest of my life."

Mr. Chilton became bustling and brisk. "My dear, let us take Mr. Han up to the second chamber," he said, putting a hand on the small gentleman's shoulder. "It is in order, I believe, and belongs to the suite where we have located his illustrious friend."

He waved away their protests with a firm hand and ushered the newcomer and his wife before him. He was intent on disposing of the matter before the train should arrive.

Muriel and Roslyn looked at each other but Bob expressed their feelings. "Phew! We're in for it!" he said softly. "A regular Chinese boarding-house. I wonder how many more are on the way. It looks sort of silly."

He disappeared into the back-hall and they knew he went to join Gladys on the back-porch, to watch for the eleven-thirty. He did not trust Jim Bradley.

The doorbell buzzed and Muriel pulled Roslyn into the small ante-room that opened out of the reception hall. "It may be that Mr. Hopkins again," she whispered. "I can't bear that man . . ."

Gladys came thumping past on her high heels, not too well pleased at being called from her vigil on the back-porch. She opened the door, and they heard her voice, raised slightly and with an edge to it.

"Yes, Mr. Chilton lives here, but he ain't got any time for book-agents."

Roslyn peeped around the doorway and saw a tall, well-groomed young man standing before the front-door, hat in hand and a most engaging smile on his face. He had fair hair and a little fair mustache. She beckoned Muriel to look. "It must be the New York drummer," she whispered. "He's so spick and span."

"Heavens, we don't keep a hotel——" began Muriel and then her eyes lighted on the stranger. "What a fascinating man," she breathed. "He's never a drummer. Hush, let's hear what he says."

His voice was too low for them to catch the end of his little speech, but Gladys was not so conven-

tional. She gave a sort of gurgling shriek and bent to stare at him.

"You can't be!" she cried. "You ain't a chink. He's a big lord from China. Why . . . why . . . My land," she ended suddenly, "I know what you are,—you're one of them fresh newspaper fellows, buttin' in," and she shut the door forcibly in his very face.

Muriel walked out of the ante-room, with head erect. She sent Gladys scampering back to her kitchen regions, and she flung open the wide front-door with an energy that surprised Roslyn, who was following her. The young man was still standing there.

"I am sure you are not a reporter," she said with unusual decision. "Won't you come in? I will ask my father to see you at once."

The young man looked relieved and delighted. He came forward with a bow and just inside the door he halted to search an inner pocket for a card. He handed it to Muriel with another bow. "May I ask you to be good enough to give him this?" he said in a pleasing voice. "I find it necessary to present my credentials," and he laughed, a low amused laugh.

Muriel fled upstairs on light feet, leaving Roslyn and the stranger standing there in the hall. Roslyn felt she must say something and she took what came first to her mind, though it sounded as if she had got it from the geography.

"Hunan is a mountain country, isn't it?" she asked. "And mines, too."

He appeared greatly pleased by her acceptance of him as genuine. "We have our Highlanders," he agreed. "A sturdy people, given to revolution. And our miners. Hunan is not well known to Americans, though." He broke off as the sound of voices came from above, and Mr. Chilton's pompous tones grew distinct as he approached the stairway. The stranger flashed a look at the Honorable James at the top of the stair and Roslyn saw that he would not be deceived by his host's grand manner. "I feel very much of an intruder," he said hastily to her, and then went forward to meet the descending group.

"Ah, he is there," cried the little withered gentleman. "Wu, my boy, you have come at last!" He was too polite to speak in any language but that of their hosts.

Mr. Wong,—how oddly the name sat,—started and flushed, then recovered and smiled. "You here, Han?" he asked. "I thought you were deep in the ancient lores of the Mongols at the British Museum. You must have flown."

"I came direct from the pier," his friend told him, as he touched his finger to his lips. "As our great K'ung-fu-tsze says, 'Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?'"

"Still quoting Confucius!" smiled Mr. Wong. He turned to the others, with a courteous manner that had the polish of an ancient civilization in it. "It is well for me that I find a friend already established in your esteem to be surety for me. May I ask to be introduced to the gracious family who

has consented to receive me? Han, please present me."

There was such an odd mingling of old world manner and natural candor in his speech that he made a good impression on all of them, and Mr. Han's evident respect for him swept away the last doubt. Roslyn scrutinized him as he bowed over Mrs. Chilton's hand and assured her of his gratitude for the generous hospitality he was to enjoy. She thought, "He is as fair as anyone I know. He simply can't be a Chinese. He must have been adopted. He isn't a fraud, I am sure. Imagine him in a kimono! Leading the Grand March, too!" and a little smile puckered her lips.

She saw Bob's face in the background. He had been at his back-porch post until now. He had evidently accepted Gladys' version of the book-agent's impudence for he called, "Sold again! He hasn't come this time either!" and then he stopped to stare. When he had been introduced and got the meaning of the scene, he came over to Roslyn. "Great, isn't he? But won't the Committee of Welcome be ready to kick themselves when they see him! They've been spreading it all around that he is a sort of an ancient Buddha and Chinese emperor rolled into one. Hopkins laid it on thick about 'his Oriental type of countenance' in his article in the *Jonesville Spirit*, this morning."

Roslyn laughed at him, for she saw that he, too, was under the spell of the stranger. She said aside to him, while the others began to move toward the stair, "And Gladys was going to turn him away!

It's like a play, isn't it? But his servant hasn't turned up yet. I suppose he'll be another surprise."

Bob was not listening to her. He was intent on the newcomers. Roslyn understood, when she caught what Mr. Chilton was saying to the fair young Mr. Wong.

"I suppose that we may attribute your presence here to the new industry in the neighborhood," he made a sort of question of it.

Mr. Wong looked puzzled. "In the neighborhood?" he repeated.

"The silk hosiery mill at Windham,—we have heard of it," Mr. Chilton explained. "A scant ten miles ——"

Roslyn was sure she caught some message in the look that flashed between the two visitors. It was Mr. Han who answered the question, smiling at the Honorable James in open admiration of his host's astuteness.

"We have long had an interest in silk-growing," he affirmed. "The illustrious family of Wong has large mulberry groves and their silk is of the best quality; no wild silk or seconds ever comes from their warehouses."

Mr. Chilton nodded. "As I imagined," he remarked to his wife and daughter, as he mounted the first step. "And now, we must install you in your quarters. Before the well-intentioned citizens are aware of your whereabouts. They will undoubtedly wait upon you at once."

Roslyn moved away toward the ante-room. Sud-

denly she felt that, after all, she was not really part of the affair. She, too, was a passer-by, without roots here. Bob tried to detain her.

"Aren't you going to see the fun?" he asked, with a hand on her sleeve. "Hopkins and Company will be here with bells on in a jiffy. It will be awfully jolly."

She shook off his hand, still laughing softly. "I must go put on my best clothes, Bobby," she said lightly. "I didn't have time to change and I know your father would like us to show up well before the Committee. You'd better run along and find Mr. Hopkins. It'll save another mix-up."

"That's right," he agreed, pleased with the prospect of breaking the news. "You've got a head on your shoulders, girl. I'll bring them like lambs to the fold . . ." and he was off by the back way, calling to Gladys as he went.

Roslyn smiled to herself at the loud confusion of voices that came from the back-precincts but the smile died when she was in her own room. The amusing aspect of the situation died; she felt depressed, and did not know why. She slipped into a fresh dress and halted for a moment at the window, trying to shake off the unusual feeling of anxiety.

The mountain across the green valley stood strong and clearly outlined against its background of clustered hills. The sun shone blithely and a flock of vesper-sparrows swooping about in the hedges below cut the air with their twitterings. All was cheerful, normal and sensible. She felt the influence of the

wholesome scene and her dark mood slipped from her.

At the threshold of her room, however, she paused. "But they did look at one another," she argued. "And it's all very strange. Why should men like that come to Belleview?"

Then she heard Mrs. Chilton's gentle tones below, speaking to Gladys Clunk on the back stairs. "Mr. Wong's man, you say? Tell him to come up, Gladys. He can bring the bags up at once. Let the taxi-man help him . . ."

Roslyn heard Gladys' voice calling to someone below.

"Here, you Tim Coogan, fetch up that box and be quick about it. You got your meter runnin' out in that bus, so shake your feet."

There was no sentiment in that tone, for there was an old feud between Irish Tim and Mennonite Gladys; a matter of blood, and birth. Mrs. Chilton could be sure that the beguiling chauffeur would not carry off her present helper.

CHAPTER VI

THE LETTER FROM CAPPONI

CAPPONI'S letter was so long that she carried it with her to her room. The curly downward tails to the g's and y's and the curly upward tails of the d's and t's made it difficult to read rapidly. She read it through once and then a second time. It turned things topsy-turvy for her, opening out a wide field of laborious days.

"But," she said aloud, "I don't know how to write an operetta," and she read the letter again, with a crease between her straight brows.

Capponi had taken that into consideration. He wrote:

> "You have not written music save one little song, and so the matter will be a serious one. You have a quick ear and are well-trained, though perhaps somewhat weak on *fugue*. But this offer is made to the Conservatory students who know no more than yourself. I suggest that you choose a small stringed quartette, with two violins, a viola and a 'cello. I will assist you. After you have chosen your theme and written some of the songs, let me know. Remember that it is for young children. . . . I enclose the leaflet of instruction . . ."

She dropped the sheet and stared unseeing ahead

of her. An operetta for young musicians, a nursery tale set to music, was what Capponi was urging her to try for. It was a boarding scholarship, offered to ex-students of the Conservatory, who had not studied in any other musical school since leaving the Conservatory.

"But," she said again, "I don't know how to do it, and I don't know what to choose if I should try."

Capponi had explained that he had got this leaflet for her after much argument.

> "I told them that the week you spent there when the class in harmony and composition was being formed entitled you to it. The fact that you were not able to remain—your honored father having taken you to India with him that year—was of no weight. Finally, they agreed, and now you must make a good showing."

Was she in for it? Was there no escape? She set her lips hard and closed her eyes, for she felt as if a trap had opened at her feet. She could not write the score for an operetta . . . four different instruments, each had to have its separate part that made up the whole melody. And there was Capponi waiting for her to thank him for this opportunity he had given her.

"No, I can't do it," she said, firmly. "I shall simply say it's impossible."

She jumped up and went to her desk and got out paper and pen. She wrote, "My dear Mr. Capponi: It is so very kind to offer me this great chance, but I cannot ——"

Bob's voice at the door made her start. He was carrying the door-stop. "Don't mind me," he said, cheerfully. "I'm going to put this thing on at last. Go on with your writing, I won't be long, or make much noise."

She swung about in her chair and watched him screw the contrivance onto the top of the door. It was a relief to get away from the thought of Capponi's disappointment when he read what she intended to write. Bob was brisk, and had the stop in place in a few minutes. He explained the two little levers he had added since her birthday.

"This one holds the door half open and this one, —up here, see, you pull this string—will keep it shut, just like a lock. It's a new idea and it ought to make it sell twice as fast. There isn't another like it on the market. Try it."

She tried it and found it worked perfectly. "I'm glad you didn't put it on the old house," she smiled at him. "Or you might never have thought of the improvements. I don't see how you've had the time to make it, though; you've done so much since we came here. The candle-stand ——"

"Is a fizzle," he broke in, with disgust. "It looks like a spider. It's too thin. I'm going to make a better one soon. I wouldn't let anyone see it, so don't ask. Say, Mother and Mew are in the sewing-room and they want you to come down. I forgot to tell you."

She tucked Capponi's letter into a pigeonhole and closed the desk. She was weak enough to be glad of the interruption. Bob gathered up his tools,

and went down with her. A peculiarly sweet whistling call came from the rooms of the visitors.

"What in the world——" she began.

Bob chuckled. "It's that cussed Hop Kee's monkey," he told her in a low tone. "He's got him in a little cage; the cutest little trick you ever saw. Keeps him hid away in his wicker cage while they are in. I'll bet they don't know he has him."

Roslyn remembered the Chinese laborers going out to their work, each with his pole with a tiny bamboo cage at the end, and in the cage a tiny animal, a toad, or a bird or a mouse or even a cricket—something to keep him company while he worked and to play with while he rested. Hop Kee, the servant-man of Mr. Wong, was thoroughly Chinese. "I'd love to see the monkey," she said. "They are so funny. Hop Kee was pretty clever to bring him all the way from China without being discovered."

"Hop Kee is one slick boy," Bob grinned. "He ought to lead the Grand March instead of the Lord Wong. He'd make a real hit, with his yellow face."

"Bob," Muriel's voice came from the open door of the sewing-room. "I wish you wouldn't speak that way of Mr. Wong, it sounds as if you were making fun of him. He'll hear you sometime and——"

"He won't mind," Bob called in to her. "He's a good sport. He is a lord, anyway, at home; old Han told me."

Muriel came to the door. "My word, you know a lot about them, and they have only been in the house a day. Perhaps you can tell us where they

have gone this morning?" Her smiling sarcasm cloaked real curiosity, a gentle kindly interest in whoever came in close touch with her.

"Sure," returned Bob promptly. "Silk-mill over at Windham. Dad guessed right, you see," and he went downstairs three steps at a time, whistling in imitation of the monkey's call.

Roslyn went into the sewing-room and, for the moment, she forgot Capponi's letter and the problem that lay before her. Mrs. Chilton was bringing out an array of silk and velvet and tissue gowns, all slightly out of fashion but all of exceedingly fine material. She turned to Roslyn with a bright welcome.

"Muriel and I are looking over the prospects for the Ball," she said with her rippling little laugh. "There ought to be good gowns here for all three of us. Come, help us out, my dear. Which color do you like best? We have secured Miss Snow, the seamstress, to do the sewing for us, and with Muriel's knack of designing, we ought to have some Parisian creations to wear on that important occasion."

Roslyn went to her and put an arm about her. "I love being asked," she said warmly, "and I'd adore to be very splendid at the party, just for your sake. But"—she did not actually know she was going to say it, it popped out of itself—"I will wear my yellow dress. It's all right. And it isn't because I'm not grateful for the offer, but I'm going to be terribly busy. Mr. Capponi has given me a lot of work to do——"

"Paying you for it?" broke in Muriel who was practical under her softness. "How wonderful!"

"I don't know whether I will get paid for it or not," Roslyn answered soberly. "It depends on how well I do it. I may fail. I probably shall. But I've got to try."

Mrs. Chilton was too kind to press the matter. Perhaps she thought that Roslyn was better employed on her music than on ball-gowns, for she said, with a tiny sigh, "It is very sensible to have a profession to fall back on, if—other things fail. I used to hope that Muriel would be a singer. One has one's fancies."

Muriel took a moss-colored tissue from the heap on the couch. "This will make a lovely frock for me with such a little work," she said. "The new sort of ornament made of the silver lace from my old blue chiffon, and"—she interrupted herself to seize a coral sequin frock from the pile—"and here, Mums, is the very thing for you. I never wore it, you know, for I looked hideous in it. We can afford some coral satin for it, and you can wear your lovely old corals——"

"Never!" cried Mrs. Chilton with energy. "I should feel like a——"

"Never mind what you'd feel like," broke in her daughter. "You'd look like a regular beauty, with your white hair and lovely skin. Wouldn't she, Roslyn? You must wear it, darling. You're not an old lady, to be always draped in black. Do let me try it around you, anyway."

Mrs. Chilton submitted to standing to have the

glittering coral robe flung about her shoulders and she was so pleased with the result that she submitted, murmuring, "I don't know what your father will say," and the matter was settled, though she added, "The green, of course, would be more suitable . . ."

Muriel handed over the green dress to her mother to rip and herself took the sequin robe. "It's so much more fussy," she said. "I like to do fussy things. One feels so proud of oneself. Now let's talk about the visitors. It isn't so bad having them here, after all. They're paying such a lot for the rooms."

"Yes, I must confess I think it is an exorbitant amount, out here in the country, but your father and Mr. Hopkins arranged that," said Mrs. Chilton, busy with her scissors. "And as Hop Kee cooks and serves their breakfast, and they expect to be out for lunch and seldom here for dinner, it is not the tax I feared it would be. Mr. Wong said he would give me notice in the morning whenever they would be in to dinner. He is a most charming young man. I did not realize there could be blond Chinamen until I saw him."

Roslyn was startled to hear Muriel voicing her own theory. "I don't believe he is a Chinaman. He must have been left with the Wong family by some American missionary friends and adopted afterward. Perhaps they wanted a boy-baby very badly, and had only girls."

"He told your father he had a younger brother at home," Mrs. Chilton remarked. "I think it more

likely that he had an English mother. He has the reddish blond hair like the English people, and such a nice straight nose. Mr. Han knows, of course, but one cannot question him. I must say I like both gentlemen exceedingly. Toward Hop Kee, I feel very differently."

"Gladys hated him on sight," Roslyn said, taking up the green chiffon sleeve that had fallen to the floor and beginning to rip its seams. "She says he's 'the spittin' image' of the laundryman who used to be here last year. All Chinamen look alike to her."

She broke off as the heavy tread of the Honorable James was heard on the stair. He had evidently caught the sound of their voices, for he came to the sewing-room and stood there on the threshold, smiling at them in benign fashion. His good humor had lasted over-night.

"Ah, busy at the fol-de-rols for the grand occasion?" he asked, playfully. "Make yourselves fine, for you will be the cynosure of all eyes. My love, I have a communication from Cousin Reginald. You recall Cousin Reginald who went to New Zealand? A magnificent specimen of manhood"—that was what he always said about his own male relatives—"and with the Midas touch. He has a great estate there, as you may see."

Mrs. Chilton took the snap-shot and the two girls bent to share it. Muriel exclaimed, "Why, it's a wonderful place, Father! A real park with deer in it. How I'd love to see it. How did he happen to write to you?"

Mr. Chilton might have told her that the letter was in reply to his own numerous pressing requests for news of his long-silent second cousin, but he merely looked important and said, grandly, "Blood is thicker than water, my child. The Chiltons never forget that they are Chiltons. Do you observe, my love, that the house is an exact copy of Chilton-Hundred? An excellent house,—the best style of Georgian, with a fine terrace."

His wife nodded. The sight of second-cousin Reginald's stately New Zealand home seemed to damp her spirits. She handed the photograph back to him with a sigh. He did not note her change of mood; he was too full of his second-cousin Reginald and his belongings. He stood in the doorway, boasting about the family whose regard he had so lightly cast away, and his wife and daughter kept their eyes on their snipping of threads. Roslyn alone looked at him.

So it was that she alone saw the grey little body in a tiny padded, blue brocade Chinese coat, step noiselessly along the hall, stop at the Honorable James' feet and cock its head up at his grey cloth legs. She thought it was going to climb up him but it did not. It came around the grey cloth legs and stood, head cocked, peering up at him. Roslyn almost cried out but Mr. Chilton did not notice her start.

"My grandfather was gentleman-in-waiting," he went on, twitching his brows at the memory.

The small monkey sat up and looked up at him with great earnestness. It had a long upper lip and

grey whiskers and it looked amazingly like the Honorable James. It was almost as if it were recognizing that fact, as it studied his long face and gesturing hand, for it sat back and waved its dark paw in the same gesture. Roslyn snorted in a most unladylike fashion, and then as quickly choked herself into propriety. She avoided the thunder on her guardian's brow by pointing to the small intruder.

"He's so terribly funny in that little coat," she managed to say.

Muriel and Mrs. Chilton dropped their work. "What a darling," cried Muriel, going toward the small creature. "Come, Jocko, or whatever your name is. Come, let me button your jacket for you. Hurry up."

She held out a luring hand but the monkey evaded her, showed his yellow teeth and finally ran up the Honorable James' leg and cuddled on his shoulder, making faces and chattering at Muriel. Mr. Chilton was gratified by this preference and scratched the tiny animal under the chin with a condescending finger, while he explained to the unenlightened females of his family.

"This is a spider monkey, a lively fellow in his native jungles of the South Sea Islands," he said, while the monkey, as if resenting this description of himself, ran down his clothes to the floor where he sat making faces up at him unheeded. Mr. Chilton was occupied with another matter. "And now I must leave you for a day or so. Business, business. Postponed because of our guests' arrival but no longer to be evaded. Good-bye, my love, try to

manage without me. I shall return on Tuesday at the latest."

He took up a bag he had set down outside the door and to his wife's amazement, he came over, stooped and placed a frigid kiss above her ear. "Until Tuesday," he said, with a benign gesture as if blessing the two girls. "Take care of our noble guests, and,"—he became rather playful—"make ready to be the belles of the Ball," and he creaked away.

The monkey looked after him, scratched his head, buttoned his coat and then suddenly disappeared. Hop Kee, in his soft padded shoes, passed the door without a glance in their direction. He was a remarkably ugly man, with a lank long jaw and tufts of black hair in his ears. He was dressed in dark-colored Chinese coat and trousers and wore a tiny skull-cap on his bony head.

"At all events, he is quiet and keeps to himself," Mrs. Chilton said, as if answering some inner protest against the man. "He will be here only a week or so."

Roslyn said nothing. Hop Kee might be listening. She knew something of Oriental servants and she did not expect too much of them. She stepped quickly out into the hall but it was empty. Hop Kee had vanished into the South Suite, taking the monkey with him, for the sweet whistling noise came from beyond the closed door. She stepped back into the sewing-room and took up the sleeve again, and began to pull the threads from the lace trimming. Muriel's laughing words about the

reason for Mr. Wong's visit to Belleview came uncomfortably back to her. Stolen jewels.

She shook the idea from her and rose to hand the sleeve to Muriel.

"There, it's finished. I must go write some letters and get them off before noon. I'll come back and help afterward."

"Never mind. Miss Snow will do the rest," Muriel assured her. "I just wanted to get them started. There's plenty of time to get everything in perfect shape by next Saturday. Do you know, Mr. Han is going to wear his robes. He brought some with him, he told Mr. Hopkins, and would wear them rather than disappoint the Committee. He's a dear, isn't he? And so cultured." She dropped her scissors abruptly. "That reminds me—your letters, I mean,—that I have to write one myself. Just a short line to Aunt Sarah. She'll want to hear about the moving. I'll leave it on the bottom step, tucked under the carpet, Roslyn, and you can take it with yours."

Roslyn understood that it was the notice to the antique-loving friend that the coast was clear, and she nodded. "I'll look for it when I come down," she promised.

In her own room, she opened her desk, tore up the letter she had commenced and wrote another, telling Mr. Capponi that she would do her best to make some sort of a musical composition. "Although it may be very poor. I hate to think of disappointing you, for you have been so good to me. Please do not be too sorry if I fail," she wrote, and felt as she

signed her name that she was going into a heavy undertaking.

"I wonder what it is that makes me care so much for music?" she thought, as she sealed the letter. "I can't help myself. I have no choice. Like Bob about his inventions; he just has to do them. Most of us are like that."

A rustling noise made her start, and there was the little monkey in the waste-basket, with a scrap of paper in his fist. He looked up at her with his bright beads of eyes and twitched his long lip, for all the world like the Honorable James in his pleasant moods. "You funny thing," she exclaimed.

"Him velly bad one. Lun away allee timeee."

Hop Kee stood at the open door, an expression of gloom upon his bony features. Roslyn felt a repulsion to his dull face and sullen air, and she said quickly, "Please call him away. I am busy just now. These letters must go in the noon mail."

Hop Kee made a gesture and the monkey ran to him and mounted to his shoulder, and nestled down with his little black thumb in his mouth, like a baby. "Him likee take a look-see evly placee," said Hop Kee, imperturbably. "Missy makee door lock. All velly good."

After he had vanished in his noiseless fashion, Roslyn finished her letter to Capponi and wrote one to the music-dealer in town from whom she had bought her music, asking him to send some music paper. She took them down halting on the way to get Muriel's letter from under the edge of the carpet at the turn of the stair. She caught a glimpse of

the little monkey peering at her from behind the curtain on one of the doors of the South Suite but he vanished when she called him. "He does run away a good deal," she thought. "And I'm glad he does, for he's such a funny thing. Even Mr. Chilton likes him."

After she had given the letter to Bob, she remembered she had left her door open and her desk-lid down. She hurried back to close them both. With the monkey about she must be more careful. Bob's door-stop creaked as she let the door swing shut after her and a shivery feeling that Hop Kee might be padding along the hall outside made her want to lock it. The key had dropped out when Bob had been working on it, but there was the string. She could test the door-stop; she would only be a minute, anyway.

She pulled the string. Yes, it held the door fast. She could not move it. "Bob's a clever boy," she thought, and pulled the string again to open it. It did not budge. Tug as she might, the door would not move.

She tried for ten minutes and gave it up. What was she to do? She would not call from the window; not yet. Besides, there was no one in sight below there to call to. They would miss her soon and Muriel or Bob would come up to fetch her to lunch. She sat down on a chair to wait. It was a joke on Bobby, she thought. Then her eyes wandered to the open door of the closet and she went to shut it. It looked disorderly.

A little ray of sunshine shone directly into the

closet, and fell on the wooden lining at the back. A long crack made a black line there and in the black line something white or whitish showed. She went over and bent to see what it was. It was a slip of paper. A bit of folded paper. Something stirred in her mind and she recalled the Psalter she had found in the attic above. The attic-nook was directly above her room. It might be possible that this scrap of folded paper was the same one that had dropped from Senator Bruce's German book.

CHAPTER VII

WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE

THE paper did not want to come out. She fished for it with a hairpin and finally brought it out, torn almost across. She spread it on her desk and brushed the dust from it. It was yellow and smudged, and entirely commonplace; a boy's badly written exercise in German.

She laughed at her own disappointment. "I suppose I've been expecting a clue to Senator Bruce's lost bank-notes," she thought. "As if they could slip down a tiny crack like that! The truth is, that I'm thinking too much of money just now."

She folded the paper and put it in the Psalter and laid the book in the drawer with the tablecloth. Mrs. Chilton and Muriel had not been greatly interested in the book, nor in the discovery that the embroidered tablecloth with the name Clara among its flower-stalks had belonged to the departed Bruces. Muriel had small liking for anything so out of fashion and so tasteless, while Mrs. Chilton was so preoccupied with all that had been thrust upon her, in the strange house with three newcomers on her hands, that only the most pressing matters got her attention. So the tablecloth and the Psalter had been given into Roslyn's keeping. "You like stupid old things," Muriel had laughed. "You ought to be able to make up a whole history of the

Bruces out of those two things, like the scientists do out of the leg-bone of one of those horrid creatures who lived a couple of million years ago."

She had not been much interested in the Bruce family and now she dismissed it from her mind, as she sat down to wait her release. She would think instead of the operetta. What in the world could she make of it? Mother Goose? No, that had been done recently by the clever rector of Trinity Chapel and his wife, who knew all about music. . . . Alice in Wonderland? No, for everyone was talking about Alice, now that the manuscript of the book had come over to Philadelphia, and many of the Conservatory pupils would be sure to choose it.

She shut her eyes and tried to picture the familiar fairy tales: Puss in Boots, Jack and the Beanstalk, the Three Bears, Aladdin, and dear old Ali Baba. She had always loved the story of Ali Baba, perhaps because of her childhood's association with caves and explorations in the East. It could not be done, though . . . or, could it?

She heard Bob's rapid step on the stair and his call, "Chow's ready, Rosie! Come along down."

He would not believe her at first. He thought she was teasing him about his cherished invention. When he understood that she was a prisoner in good faith, he declared the door must be locked, and demanded the key.

"I'm in here, goose," she laughed. "How could I lock myself in from the outside? It's the doorstop."

He was clattering downstairs and soon was call-

ing up to her from the roof of the side-porch, directing her to catch the rope he threw up to her. When, after a couple of failures, she got it, he told her to slip it in through the east window and out the west, and drop the end down to him. He made the end secure around the stout branch of a Norway maple where the other end was made fast, and began to climb up.

"Like a ladder," he laughed as he climbed in at the window. "That's a new idea, I'll bet. Now let's see what's the matter?"

He took the string, gave a couple of energetic jerks and the lever dropped into place. He opened the door with a bow. "I told you it was all right," he said. "You didn't pull hard enough."

"I almost pulled my arms out," she returned with spirit. "I tried for ten minutes——"

"Hello, here's the key," he interrupted, stooping to the edge of the hall carpet. "Miss Blake, you're trying to pull something on me. You had that key all the time——"

It was her turn to interrupt. "What nonsense," she cried, impatient at his disbelief. "I haven't seen it since you dropped it out of the door this morning. I meant to hunt for it but forgot."

He looked disconcerted. "That's funny," he remarked, and then his face lighted. "I bet it's that little monkey. Gladys said he was all over the house this morning. That's it. The little imp!"

She had to agree, for there could be no other explanation for the appearance of the key after its hours of hiding. The gaunt, sullen face of Hop Kee

intruded itself but she would not give way to folly. Just because a man was ugly it did not follow that he was a dangerous person. Mr. Wong would not have a man who was not trustworthy. Then she remembered the little monkey as he watched her take Muriel's letter from under the carpet edge. "He imitates everybody," she thought, with a laugh. "We'll have to be careful while he is about."

She spent the afternoon walking along the hilly lane that led through the valley, past the crumbling graveyard and past the foot of Fortune Hill to the sides of the next slope. She felt she must find the subject for her musical venture at once, or be lost. The competition closed in a month.

"I was crazy to say I'd try, and Capponi must have known it was too short a time. A month,—it ought to take a year."

Yet the operetta was to be extremely short, for it was limited to five songs and three choruses with dialogue between: the songs being repeated as often as the writer pleased. It was intended for young children whose memories could not be overtaxed. The aim of the Conservatory was not to produce an operetta but to find out how much its students knew of the methods of orchestration. She realized this, and it propped her drooping energy. "A month is a month," she said aloud. "We're all in the same boat," and after a breath, she added, "I'll take Ali Baba. I've got my old book somewhere. I'll dig it out and begin this very afternoon."

Back across the valley she went, with a whirl of pleasant excitement in her mind. Fortune Hill

reared its dark crown, untouched as yet by frost, against the clear blue of the sky. Life seemed to flow out of it; it stood like an army with banners, and the sight of it sent a thrill along her veins. "Fortune Hill," she murmured. "I'll pretend that Ali Baba's country is over the other side, just out of sight. That will make it seem real to me. And it will keep me at work, too, for whenever I look out of my west window I'll think of what's going on over there in the land of make-believe. I hope Pressers send out the music-paper soon."

She went back to Belleview House through the bright September sunshine and already a little tune, with the thud of Ali Baba's axe chopping the wood for his customers, was humming through her head. A very simple little tune it was, so simple that she was afraid she was remembering it from some old nursery song. She went in through the back entrance and met Gladys, nodded to her, and went on, humming as she went. If she forgot the notes she might not be able to recall them.

At the old piano in the music-room she tried it over, unconscious that Gladys hung at the threshold, until she was startled by an exclamation.

"My gracious, that's like the songs Mom ust to sing to me," Gladys cried. "It remembers me of when I was a kid. Mom was a great hand for songs before she got too fat."

"Do you know it?" Roslyn played it again, her heart sinking.

"No, not jest that one," Gladys replied. "But it remembers me of them songs."

Roslyn had an inspiration. "Have you a piano at home?"

"Not yet," answered Gladys brightly. "But we're a-goin' to swap the organ in for a pianner that plays, soon's I make enough. Next month, I guess."

"An organ is all right," Roslyn told her. "I want to play this song for your mother, to see if it is an old one. Would she recognize it, do you think?"

"Sure, she knows 'em all, on'y she's got too fat to sing any more. Yes, she'll be home," she added, in reply to the question on Roslyn's lips. "She gets supper right early. I've got to get some clean aprons and things for dinner to-night, so I'll go over along," and she dashed away to make ready.

Roslyn was glad to have her doubts settled, and she only delayed to scribble the notes on a scrap of paper before she joined the other. Gladys was in high feather and she took it for granted that Roslyn shared her emotions.

"I'm goin' to wear my white linen, with a black ribbon to my cap," she said happily. "What, didn't you know His Lordship was goin' to be in to dinner to-night? He come back right after lunch and asked the Mrs. if he might and she said, 'Sure.' I guess I'll feel pretty trimbly when I'm waitin' on table for a real Chinese big-bug like that," and she giggled, adding in another tone, "That nasty Hop Kee's goin' to wash up afterward, and believe *me* I won't lift a finger to show him where things belong. He'll have to find out where the dishes go."

Roslyn laughed at her heat, and her own repugnance to the Chinaman dimmed. "Perhaps he'll

have his monkey to help him," she teased. "*He* ought to know every nook and cranny in the house, —the way he's been scampering about to-day. He goes everywhere."

"Ain't he the young limb!" Gladys' face dimpled with fun. "Such a comical face. I 'most bust, laughin' at him when I seen him, a-twiddlin' his eyebrows at me, jest like"—she caught herself in time—"jest like a real wise guy," she amended. "There, I see Mom takin' in the clothes. She's at home, all right. She'll be tickled pink to see you."

Mrs. Clunk was as broad as she was high, and every lap and collap of flesh beamed with good-nature, as she came, like a lightly bouncing ball, to the gate to welcome them. She was even prettier than her daughter and the green print bungalow apron that encased her rotund form brought out all the fresh tints of her smiling face. She ushered Roslyn into the darkened parlor while Gladys went to get her best uniform, and real pleasure shone from her twinkling eyes when she heard what was wanted of her.

"Sure, I kin spot the old ones," she declared with confidence. "I usta belong to three singin' sociables and we didn't let nothin' git by us. Hymns and pop'lar songs and music-hall hits and ole-fashioned stuff,—we knew 'em all. Could sing 'em right off without lookin' at a paper, too. It makes me laff to see these here singers with their big sheet of music in their hands, as if they didn't half know what they're singin' ——"

Roslyn had to break in on her. She hated to be

urgent but time was passing. Mrs. Clunk listened with critical, cocked head as she played the little tune, and was instant in her decision.

"Nope, that's a new one to me, though it's got the tang of the old ones, too," she said. "Sorta sounds like them music-show songs, and yet it don't. It's awful pritty, anyways. Now, when I was up at Joneswille Choral——"

Gladys, with her bundle, saved Roslyn from having to interrupt again. "Well, so long, Mom," she said brightly. "We've got to beat it. Seein' you're about ready and all," she added to Roslyn who had risen from the organ stool.

Mrs. Clunk was not disturbed. She went with them to the gate, talking all the while of her triumphs at Jonesville and they left her still in full tide. Roslyn felt some compunction but Gladys assured her that she had not hurt Mrs. Clunk's feelings. "She's ust to folks doin' that. She's got so terrible gabby, since she don't go about much, that you'd never git off, if you stopped for her to wind up them stories," she said cheerfully. "Say, you oughta git her to tell you about the Windham picnic, when you've got time. She tells it great, believe me."

Her admiration of her mother's powers was so genuine that it robbed her comment of any shadow of unkindness. She was plainly one who looked things full in the face. Mom was too fat to sing in public, and she was a terrible talker but she was great, nevertheless. Roslyn understood that these two were very dear to each other, and she envied

Gladys the comradeship. Gladys, all unconscious of the thoughts she had raised, went on.

"Are you goin' to doll up, Miss Blake? The Mrs. said Mr. Bob had to put on his best clothes. I heard her tellin' him."

Roslyn evaded the question, laughing. "It's going to be a great event, Gladys," she said, as they separated at the side of the house. "I hope the *Jonesville Spirit* doesn't send a man over to report it,—I shouldn't know how to behave, with a newspaper man writing it all down."

Gladys was not to be teased. "I guess *The Spirit* 'ud have the whole front page in big letters, if any of their folks was in our boots," she flung back as she hurried around the corner of the house. "My gracious, yes indeed!"

Roslyn ran upstairs on light feet. Her little song was still humming in her head. She had begun her task and it did not loom so dark before her now. She stopped at Muriel's room and tapped softly on the door. Muriel opened it a mere crack until she saw who it was. "Oh, it's you," she exclaimed. "I'm so glad. I want you to tell me whether to wear my old pink or the blue chiffon. Mr. Wong is to dine with us to-night ——"

"I know," Roslyn broke in. "Gladys told me. Wear the blue. It's the color he'd like. Blondes always like blue."

Muriel pretended to be displeased. "But I'm not dressing for him," she began.

"Of course not," mocked Roslyn, who loved to see the pretty color rise in Muriel's smooth cheeks.

"You must put on the blue for Bob, then. He likes it. So does your mother. But what I came for is another matter. Your mother said you had a 'phone from Miss Gordon. Did you tell Aunt Sarah what trains her friend could come on?"

Muriel nodded. "And Bob's willing to fetch them up. He says he's making the gas go twice as far as it used to. But, dear me, he really oughtn't to be sure of what his gas-saver will do, with that old wreck ready to fly to pieces."

"That ought to be all the better test," Roslyn laughed, as she closed the door, and she went up to set down the little tune on the only sheet of music-paper she had.

She found a package on the table at the turn of the upper stair. It was addressed in Mr. Capponi's fine Italian hand and, when she opened it, she found it was a paper-covered book,—Prout's *Practical Guide to Orchestration.* How dear of Capponi to take so much trouble for her! She ran over the Preface and Introductory Chapter with eager eyes, snapping up the advice contained there. The second paragraph . . . "Ought to be able to tell at once by what instrument or combination of instruments it is being played," was not new to her, for she had gone to the Orchestra more than once just for that practice. The fifth paragraph was the toughest.

"Many things which look well on paper sound very ineffective when submitted to actual performance. . . ." That was so true. Her little tune looked absolutely silly on paper but both Gladys and Mrs. Clunk had liked it. She laid down the

book, with two things determined on,—she would study the score of the *Quartette in D Major* by Mozart which she had gotten to follow the Flonzaley concert last spring, and she would keep up her practice in picking out separate instruments by listening to the Victrola whenever she could.

She dressed hastily and ran downstairs to the music-room. It was very dusky there, but she knew the cabinet by heart and her fingers quickly found the album of chamber-music, and the fresh soft-tone needles. She thought she could get in a little practice by picking out the viola from the violins and the 'cello. She had to take the record to the window to make sure of it and she caught the gleam of Miss Bump's candle-lit dining-room beyond the thinning poplars. The Ball, Old Home Week and the amiable authoress made a pleasant confusion in her mind and she started the machine with a smile at the corners of her lips.

She listened, with her ear close to the box, absorbed in her task, and when the notes ended she was startled to hear a voice in the shadowy room behind her.

"As the Master K'ung-fu-tsze says, 'It is by the Rules of Propriety that the character is established but it is from music that the finish is received," said the gentle voice of Mr. Han. "I have heard that most excellent Quartette played in London. My friend, Mr. Krantz, was the first violin."

"Do you know Krantz?" Roslyn's voice was quick with interest. "I've wanted to hear him but ——"

"Chow now," the level tones of Hop Kee came from the doorway. "Missee Chuldlum say, come by."

Mr. Han waited for her to pass out before him, bowing as she preceded him from the room. Hop Kee stood like a statue in the hall, ready to follow. Roslyn noted that Mr. Han halted to murmur some unintelligible words to the man, who nodded and disappeared noiselessly in the direction of the back-stairs. Her distrust of Hop Kee woke again and she went toward the dining-room with the pleasant confusion that had been in her mind suddenly clarified into a definite aversion to the silent, unsmiling servant of Mr. Wong.

"If I ever do show the snuff-bottle, it will be to Mr. Han, and I'll take good care Hop Kee isn't in the house when I do," she thought, as she entered the dining-room. "And as for the necklace . . ." She broke off to say, under her breath, "It looks like a real party."

Mr. Han, at her side, smiled and remarked, with one of his little bows, "As the Ninth Khanda of the Brahman says, 'Food is power,' and therefore we dress to honor it and the givers. Allow me to draw your chair for you."

She bowed to them all as she took her seat. She was wondering where Hop Kee had gone. "I'm glad I locked my door this time," she thought, and then became aware that Mr. Wong was addressing her.

CHAPTER VIII

ROSLYN LOSES SOMETHING

"I UNDERSTAND that you spent some time in China, Miss Blake," he said as he seated Muriel in her chair beside his own. "I have been asking Mrs. Chilton how long you stayed there and where you lived."

"And I have been unable to tell him," smiled Mrs. Chilton with her mind on the carving of the roast before her. "Those Chinese names are so difficult, unless it's Hong Kong or Peking or Canton. I never can remember them."

Muriel's little laugh had an apologetic note in it. "Neither can I," she confessed, prettily. "I'm terribly stupid about languages, but I love the arts, and China has such wonderful things of that sort."

Mr. Wong did not seem to think badly of this rather feeble speech, for he smiled down on her with approval and seemed to forget his interest in Roslyn's visit to his native land, as he took his place and unfurled his napkin: he had evidently forgotten her speech about Hunan. Mr. Han, however, was not so absorbed and he took up the subject, recalling that Roslyn had already told him in their first few minutes of meeting that she had spent only a few months in Peking.

"And your honored father went much into the interiors, I recall," he said, looking intently at her

out of his slanting, twinkling eyes. "Did he, too, admire Chinese art? Or was he one of those remarkable Americans who think only of business?"

Roslyn felt as if she were being put through some catechism and she replied rather stiffly and changed the subject as deftly as she could. Mr. Han seemed to accept her reluctance with good humor; no doubt he attributed it to grief for a respected parent and liked her the better for it. Bob broke out in admiration of the machine that the guests had secured for their convenience.

"She's an angel," he declared to Mr. Wong. "I'd like to have the chance to try my gas-saver on her ——"

"Bob!" exclaimed Muriel, in annoyance. "Do forget those grubby things for a minute, at least. Mr. Wong doesn't care for your gas-saver, particularly on a hired car."

"Perhaps a hired car would be better than one's own," laughed the young man, falling in with her attitude; then, as he saw the flush on Bob's face, he added, kindly, "Have you really got such a device? I'd like mightily to see it, don't you know. It's jolly intr'sting to try them out, and see how they behave under varying conditions."

Bob was mollified and plunged into a description of the principles of his invention, to which Mr. Wong listened with keen interest. He evidently knew a good deal about motors. What a puzzle he was, with his Oxford accent, his pale gold hair and his Chinese background. Mrs. Chilton, having carved the roast, was at leisure to lead the talk into

pleasant channels and Bob's technicalities troubled her. She turned to Mr. Han.

"Do you know, we have found that this house had some contact with your country," she began, while Gladys was serving the caramelled potatoes. "The daughter of the senator who built this house married a Chinese gentleman. A Miss Bruce; she died soon after she went to Hong Kong."

Roslyn saw that at once Mr. Wong's whole attention was centered on Mrs. Chilton though he bent his head courteously toward Muriel, who was chattering on about the authoress of "Hearts Aflame." As soon as Mrs. Chilton had ended, he spoke with what seemed to Roslyn intense interest, though she afterward put it down to his deference to his hostess.

"Miss Bruce, did you say, Madame?" he repeated. "Was her name, by any chance Clara Bruce?" He paused, evidently in response to a movement of Mr. Han's foot under the table. "We heard of a young American lady of that name ——"

"But, oh, very, very long ago," interposed Mr. Han, suavely. "It is a gossip which has come down through a decade, Mrs. Chilton. A young American lady, very charming, who was a great belle in Hong Kong nearly thirty years ago. I saw her myself and most greatly admired her. It is of great interest to find that we have been so fortunate as to be entertained by another charming American lady in that beautiful American's former home."

Mr. Wong was not silenced, but he took the avenue that Han had opened for him. "A beautiful foreigner who becomes one of us is not soon for-

gotten," he remarked, more casually. "I have heard the legend of this lady and would be glad to know something of her history. Her family lived here, you say, Madame? Did she have many brothers and sisters? And where are they now?"

Mrs. Chilton made a gesture that expressed more than her words. "Her father and mother died about a year after she did. There was no family,—only the three. It was very sad."

Roslyn was glad she had not told him that the house had been sold to satisfy the creditors, nor had she spoken of the rumors of financial difficulties and physical weakness that had hastened the end. The unhappy Bruces, with their lost prestige, deserved to be shielded from idle curiosity. Hop Kee created a diversion at this moment, however, and saved Mrs. Chilton from the question that Mr. Wong had on the tip of his tongue.

Hop Kee marched into the room, bearing a fine glass plate full of sweetmeats—candied oranges, persimmons and the like, done in the powdery Chinese sugar, and in approaching Mrs. Chilton to offer her the fruit, he glided in front of Gladys who was about to serve the olives. Mrs. Chilton smiled at Hop Kee and accepted one of the sticky oranges that smelled and tasted like sweetened varnish, while Gladys waited, tossing her head. As Hop Kee, obeying a look from his master, passed quickly on, Gladys set her dish down before Mrs. Chilton with a hand that actually trembled with rage.

She stooped toward her mistress. "If I'm to serve, I'll serve," she said in a stage whisper. "I

don't want to make a fuss, nor nothing, but I'll get mixed up if anyone butts in. *And* I was taught, 'ladies before gentlemen,' and not pushin' folks out of their rights."

Muriel and Roslyn began to talk rather loudly on any subject they could muster, and Mr. Wong became again deeply absorbed in Bob's mechanics, until Mrs. Chilton, in a few quiet words, smoothed the situation, returned the olive-dish to Gladys to continue about the table after Hop Kee with the candies, and when the man had finally placed his dish upon the table and vanished, and the maid had withdrawn to her pantry, she smiled at her right hand neighbor, Mr. Han.

"Gladys has a good heart but is too impetuous," she said. "She will learn better, I am sure."

Mr. Han smiled back at her but there was an undertone in his suave voice as he replied, "As the Lord K'ung-fu-tsze has said, 'Of all people, girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve to them, they are discontented.' Not that such sayings could apply to young ladies," he added, politely. "They were spoken of young children and of servants. And now, Mrs. Chilton, allow me to tell you how much we admired your village church. We stopped there last night on our way from Jonesville, and found it excellent."

"I am sorry to say we have not seen it yet," Mrs. Chilton confessed with a smile. "We have been here only a little over a week ourselves and there has

been so much to attend to. Do they have service on Saturday nights?"

He shook his head. "We visited the edifice," he replied smiling.

Roslyn, as she listened to the chat going on around her, had a feeling of content deep down within her. Her annoyances or suspicions were all on the surface, it seemed, and had nothing to do with the inner emotions. Perhaps the dinner-table was more attractive than usual,—no,—Mrs. Chilton was always lavish with lace and flowers, though she had to do the lace-cloths up herself, oftener than not. It was not the table, with its flowers and silver and delicate china, nor the formal dress, though that all added to it; it was the fact that in spite of difference of race and creed, they were all of the same sort,—Mr. Han, with his quotations, the fair Englishy Mr. Wong, and the others. They were real people, not poseurs like the Honorable James. She wished the Honorable James would stop away for the rest of the week.

"He spoils everything," she thought, dreamily. "Everything that he can . . . there are lots of things that he can't touch . . ." and suddenly, without warning, she began to hear a clinking, tinkling air, like golden coins falling into a measure—the measure that Ali Bab's wife borrowed from her sister-in-law. It was like a miracle, as if someone else had made and sung it for her. She dropped her eyes to her plate, memorizing it. She must not lose it. She was amazed and thankful; two tunes already in her grasp and she had only got the idea

a few hours ago! A rush of gladness filled her, and she laughed aloud, a low happy laugh that came from her heart.

She came to herself, rather startled at her own absent-mindedness, but no one had noticed her. They were all listening to Bob, who had been telling about the circus that was being got up for Old Home Week.

"They've got a wildcat and an elephant, and they're promised two camels from the farm over near Jonesville where the camels spend the winter," he was saying. "You ought to lend them that spider-monkey of yours, Mr. Wong. He'd be a whole side-show in himself ——"

"My monkey?" asked Mr. Wong with surprise. "A spider-monkey?"

Mr. Han waved a bland hand. "It is evident that our estimable Hop Kee has supplied himself privately with one of those pets to which he is so addicted," he remarked calmly. "He does not exhibit his animals to us, as a rule. I believe, though I may be mistaken, that his present companion is a sapajou,—quite different from the spider-monkey, though sometimes confused with them. The spider-monkey does not enjoy the advantage of a thumb, although he has greater use of his tail which is smooth on the under side to facilitate its grasp. The sapajou is sturdier and in consequence is generally used by the grinders of street-organs."

Mr. Wong listened to the long speech with some signs of impatience but he did not speak until his elderly friend had finished. "I hope the little

beggar has not caused you any annoyance, Mrs. Chilton? I take it that he has been out about the house, or you would not have known of his presence —any more than I did. I'll tell Hop Kee to get a smaller pet, since he must have one."

There was a chorus of protest, in which Mrs. Chilton was as earnest as Bob or Muriel, and Mr. Wong was obliged to take back his threat. He even gave in to the suggestion,—from Muriel,—that the monkey be brought down to make his acquaintance, and Hop Kee was summoned by repentant Gladys who volunteered to call him from his quarters upstairs where he had retired on the hint from his master.

The monkey, Ling Loo, came dressed in his absurd brocade coat, and immediately ran to the shelter of Mr. Han's shoulder, as to an old acquaintance, from which point of vantage he peered about with his black needle eyes. The lights and flowers and glitter excited him and he began to show off. He bowed, took off an imaginary hat, put his paws in the wide sleeve of his coat and strolled down the table in imitation of a fat mandarin taking a walk, and then spying the empty chair of the Honorable James which stood at the foot of the table, he skipped into it and sat, a tiny morsel between its large carved arms, blinking at them and twitching his long upper lip.

"My land! ain't he the spittin' image of the b——" Gladys, behind Roslyn's chair, caught herself before the *boss* was out. "Of them big orange-o-tangs," she amended, and plunged back into her pantry, covered with shame and contrition.

Every one of them had the same thought, how like he was to the Honorable James,—and Gladys' amendment did not deceive anyone. Mrs. Chilton could not restrain a soft ripple, which she covered by saying that monkeys were always so amusing; Muriel hid her mirth and, of course, the two guests preserved a correct front; it was Bob who resented Gladys' speech. He flushed and frowned, and was absolutely silent for the rest of the meal.

Mr. Wong motioned to Hop Kee, who made a low whistling sound almost inaudible to the others. Ling Loo cocked his head and looked down the vista of tablecloth on a level with his snapping eyes; then he rose and made his way down the center of the table, picking up a nut here and a cake there, until he had the sleeves of his brocade coat filled. These he delivered to Hop Kee as a matter of course. Hop Kee grinned.

"Aw lightee. I takee good clare of 'em," he told the little ape, and to the company he explained, "Ling Loo likee clake blime-by. Not likee now. Want me to put chow in littla box."

Mr. Han waved him away, with an indulgent smile. "Take him now, Hop Kee. But allow him only half. And lock his little box, or he will overeat," and he began a learned discourse on the secretive habits of monkeys that relieved the tension. Bob alone would not smile.

After dinner was over and Roslyn had excused herself on the plea of work, she came on him mounting to his own room to change into his work-clothes. He broke out as she neared him. "It was dirty

mean of them to laugh. They wouldn't have done it if he'd been here."

"But, Bob dear, the little thing looked so funny, no one could help laughing," she said, putting a hand on his arm. "Your father himself laughed at him."

"That's different," persisted Bob, frowning. "You know what made them laugh was that fresh Gladys saying he looked like Dad. There's nothing so funny about a monkey sitting in a chair. It was what Gladys said."

He shut his door with no gentle hand and she went on her way, wondering at the strangeness of the human heart. Here was Bob, who had been systematically suppressed by his father, who had been regularly spanked each night until he was twelve years old and had rebelled, who seldom had a kind word from his cynical parent, sticking up for his unnatural father. It did not soften her toward the Honorable James but it made her love Bob more.

Muriel came running up after her and followed her into her room, closing the door. She spoke in a low voice, very earnest and urgent in her plea.

"Do come downstairs to sleep while these people are here," she put a hand on Roslyn's arm to make her understand how much it meant to her. "I am all alone on that side of the house and I feel creepy, with Hop Kee going and coming all the time past my door. It will only be for a few days. Do, Rosie."

The use of Bob's pet name moved Roslyn strangely. She laid her slim, strong fingers on

Muriel's pink ones and smiled at her in loving mockery. "Of course I'll come, if you want me so much," she said. "I know lots of voodoo to cast off the Evil Eye and chase away witches; do you prefer African magic or East Indian? I'll practice whichever you like best . . ."

"Oh, now you're teasing," Muriel pouted. "I'm not really afraid. I just feel lonely in this big house. I haven't got used to it yet."

Roslyn squeezed her soft shoulder. "I'll come right down, Mew," she promised, "and we'll open the door between our rooms. That will be cozy, won't it? But I'll keep my books and papers up here, so I can work where it is quiet."

Muriel was well satisfied with this arrangement and offered to help move some of the necessary articles. Roslyn loaded her with her bathrobe, slippers and night things and she went away, humming blithely, quite released from her dread of Hop Kee's presence in the rooms across the hall from her.

"It's queer that she feels like I do about him," Roslyn thought as she gathered some garments from the closet. "She's usually so generous about other people's oddities." She really did not think it strange at all; she was merely trying to be fair to Hop Kee, straining a point in his favor. Gladys did not like him, nor did Mrs. Chilton. Bob thought him a jolly queer old cuss but a good sport; this mainly because he possessed the monkey Ling Loo. All the masculine part of the group seemed to consider Hop Kee quite all right.

"Nevertheless, I'll take my little pouch down with me, where I can have an eye on it," she thought, and dived into her trunk for the pouch. She tucked it into the folds of her morning frock, caught up the little worn testament which her father had carried through all his travels, and with the photograph in her other hand started downstairs.

She heard someone in the hall below, beyond the turn. Mr. Han's voice had an edge of sharpness to it. He was evidently speaking to Mr. Wong.

"The Brahman says, 'As a beautiful flower, full of color but without scent, are the fine but fruitless words of him who does not act accordingly,' and you, my friend, speak of your home with emotion yet you fly from me to spend your time in this place. Each day is a bead in the eternal necklace——"

He broke off as Roslyn coughed rather loudly. Mr. Wong's door closed with a snap, but Mr. Han remained standing in the hall. He came forward, his kind face wrinkled with concern for her. "Allow me to be of service," he said and he stooped to pick up the slipper that had fallen from her load.

Roslyn's ears were humming with that last word he had uttered. It blotted out all that had gone before. He had spoken of a necklace. . . . She made an awkward effort to shift the arm-load and her bedroom slippers, and the pouch tumbled out. Muriel appeared on her threshold, eager to help, but Mr. Han was before her. He delivered the pouch to Roslyn with a bow and gave the slipper into Muriel's keeping, as if, Roslyn thought, he

understood that the bag was too precious to be allowed in any other than its owner's keeping.

Roslyn tucked the pouch into her bundle again, greatly vexed with herself for her blundering. After all her care, after hiding her precious bag from everyone, even from Muriel's friendly eyes, she had let this stranger see it at the very moment when he had been speaking of it to his mysterious friend Mr. Wong. She almost wept with rage and disgust at her own clumsiness, but after a few minutes inside the bedroom, as Muriel chattered on about the advantage of the second floor over the third, she grew more composed. She thought, "How do I know he was speaking of my necklace? It isn't the only necklace in the world. And why should he know that there was a necklace in the box? There might be a bracelet or a brooch and earring set in it."

Decidedly, she was getting silly about nothing. She tried to think the matter over, after Muriel had put out her light and got into her bed. She could hear her soft regular breathing in the next room and the sound brought her back to commonsense; it was so normal and natural. She grew drowsy while she reasoned with her fears and gradually she won herself back to a sensible state of mind. Mr. Han's kind face floated before her as she drifted off into a delicious state of half-sleep, half-waking, and in that face there was no menace; only truth and kindness. "Yes," she murmured, "he is a good man . . . but Hop Kee . . ."

In the morning she was wakened by Muriel, who stood in a flood of sunshine, laughing at her.

"There, you see how nice it is to have someone near you all night," she said. "You've slept an hour longer than you do up there by yourself. Come along, do. It's almost eight, and we'll be late for breakfast. I'll wait, if you hurry. Aunt Sarah's antique-er, as Bob calls him, is coming this morning. She 'phoned just now. She said the letter had come in the first mail, and she didn't want to risk delay."

Roslyn hopped out of bed in a jiffy and hurried to the bathroom which Muriel shared with her parents. She made short shrift of her bath but before she had finished, she heard someone go along the hallway past the bathroom.

"I thought you were going to wait for me, Mew," she called, flinging her bathrobe about her and thrusting her feet into her slippers. "I'll pop into my clothes and be ready ——"

The rest of the sentence died on her lips as she peered down the hallway. No one was there. Muriel was singing as she went about her room, tidying it and she denied that she had tried to play any trick on Roslyn. She had not left her room. "It must have been Ling Loo nosing about," she suggested. "I thought I heard him chattering. Let's lock our doors, so he can't rummage about, if he comes up while we're away. Mercy, I must get my door-curtain up. Those poles look so bare with only the rings on."

When they went down, they found the guests had gone away early. Mrs. Chilton told them as she poured the coffee. "They will be back some time

to-morrow," she said cheerfully. "We will be quite to ourselves,—until your father arrives. Did he say what train he would come on, Bob? You are to meet him, are you not?"

"Bob offered but he wouldn't hear to it," laughed Muriel, buttering her toast. "He said he had more respect for his neck, didn't he, Bobby?"

Her brother grunted something. "When is the antique-er coming?" he demanded as if to change to a more agreeable subject. "Either of you girls want to go meet him? I mightn't know him. What do you say?"

Mrs. Chilton, who had been told of the expected arrival, spoke quickly. "Miss Snow will be here at eight-thirty, Muriel. She can only stay an hour and a half this morning."

"So that settles my being a Committee of Welcome," Muriel remarked. "Roslyn says she is going to study like a Turk; so you'll have to face the terrible Mr. Horatio G. Bullden alone, Robert. Eat all the breakfast you can, for you may need it. I feel sure he's going to be a real hurricane of a man. Horatio G. Bullden . . . can't you see what a fierce giant he simply has to be?"

Bob was disdainful, but the picture of the antique-loving friend of Aunt Sarah had so impressed the others that as the time drew near for Bob's car to return from the station, they all three came together on the front porch, drawn by curiosity and the desire to get a view of the stalwart Mr. Bullden at the first moment he entered the Belleview drive. The sweeping circle of the drive was in full view, ex-

cept for a short space where the clump of shrubberies hid it.

Muriel gave a sigh of satisfaction as she looked about. The lawns, thanks to Bob, were smooth and green, and the iron St. Bernard dogs had disappeared from the front steps. "The deer don't show so much," she remarked, complacently. "Oh, there's Bob. And Mr. Bullden hasn't come. It's a woman."

"He certainly is tearing along," his mother said, with a smile. "He has his gas-saver on, he told me, and ——"

Astonishment robbed her of breath. Bob's car with its neat spinsterish person in it, sped up the circle and past the porte-cochère, down the other curve toward the gate. "What in the world ——" began Muriel.

"He's coming up again," cried Roslyn. "Is he demonstrating the machine or what?"

They had a glimpse of a white face under a black hat as the car raced past for the second time. "It's a he!" cried Muriel. "I saw his legs sticking out and his trousers. Oh, why doesn't Bob stop!"

They ran down on the gravel before the porch steps and waved frantically as the machine swooped toward them for the third time but Bob did not halt. On the fourth round he shouted something they did not catch. On the fifth circuit he roared, 'Clutch isn't working," and on the sixth he supplemented it with, "Carburetor on the blink."

"Heavens, he may go on all day like this," exclaimed Muriel. "Suppose I get a rope and lasso him? I'll tie it about a tree ——"

"Look," Roslyn's voice was tense. "He's going to jump,—the man, I mean. Oh, no, he's sitting down again."

With a roar and a rattle the ancient machine headed around on its ninth lap, and their hearts were in their mouths as they saw the frail figure in black sag sideways and roll out of the open side of the car onto the grass and lie quite still while the car racketed on its way. The figure sat up before they could get to it. Bob was back again, raced past them yelling that he was going to jump. "Get out of the way!" he shouted and rose, waving his arms above his head.

"Don't!" screamed Muriel, with her hands over her eyes. "You'll be killed!" Mrs. Chilton drew a deep breath; and Roslyn shut her lips. The voice of the stranger on the grass was plaintive yet firm. "I wasn't killed," he began. "If you relax, you're never hurt——"

"Bob!" they shouted in an agonized chorus and then Roslyn doubled up in helpless laughter, for as Bob leaped lightly to the earth, the car faltered and stood quite still, as if it had no power in itself. As if it had been playing a joke on them.

The frail gentleman on the grass sat complacently watching them as their questions surged around the inventor. He seemed to enjoy the whole affair much more than poor Bob who tried to tell them that he had been helpless. "I just had to go on till the gas was used up," he reiterated, savagely. "There wasn't any danger."

"Then why were you going to jump?" demanded

Muriel. "If it was all right, why didn't you stay in till it stopped?"

Bob gestured toward the gentleman on the grass. "He rolled out and I thought it was only polite to see whether he was hurt or not," he retorted. "I'm not quite a heathen."

"I appreciate your interest, I assure you," the gentleman responded, still sitting quietly on the grass. "And I am happy to tell you that it has been a delightful and novel experience. In fact, the invigorating effect of being so near to nature's heart," he patted the earth upon which he sat, "is so pleasing that I am loath to leave it for the ordinary posture. But I suppose I must. No good thing lasts forever," and he rose with great agility. "Allow me to introduce myself—Mr. Horatio G. Bullden. I have a kind note from Miss Sarah Gordon,—to you, Mrs. Chilton, for I take it that you *are* Mrs. Chilton, though you may be her daughter."

Roslyn had never seen so odd a person as Mr. Horatio G. Bullden; who was willowy and yet vigorous, affected and sincere, ugly and attractive, and she wished she might stay to become better acquainted with Miss Sarah's connoisseur but, as she was about to go to her room, a sudden idea came to her. She might manage to take Mr. Bullden aside and show him the necklace and snuff-bottle. Would it be possible to do it without attracting attention? It was worth trying, anyway.

She slipped up to her room, pulled out the dresser drawer, opened the pouch and then gave a low cry:

"It's gone. The sandalwood box is gone!"

She searched for an hour. She examined every nook and cranny in the room but she did not find it. The jade necklace had disappeared.

"The snuff-bottle is there," she thought in bewilderment. "Why didn't they take that? Did they know that the necklace was only an imitation? No, they couldn't have known that . . . who . . ." She paused, suddenly sure of the thief.

CHAPTER IX

DR. BRIGGS CALLS

"HOP KEE has taken it."

The thought flashed on her as if a dazzling flood of light had been thrown into the dark corners of her mind, and suspicion changed to certainty and aversion became a subtle fear. She saw the ugly Chinaman as a creeping menace, not only to her but to the whole household. Hop Kee was ——

Her eyes fell on the photograph of her father on the dresser before her and, into the storm of her fear and surprise came his voice,—"Give the other fellow a chance to speak for himself. Don't judge him too quickly. . . ."

She bent her head and leaned her forehead on her clinched hands. It was bitterly hard to follow such teachings, particularly when it was Hop Kee who was to be judged. "He had no right to come into my room when the door was closed," she muttered. "Only a thief opens a closed door."

Again the voice, so sane and reasonable, "Don't judge him too quickly." It spoke as clearly as if the words had been uttered aloud, and it had such power over her heart that she had to yield to its sway. She raised her head, took the photograph and kissed it passionately, thinking, "He was kind to everyone. I can never be like him." Not realizing that now, in her submission to him, she was

nearer to his high standards than she had been before the wave of love had swept her clean of her first flash of hot anger. She tried to act as he would have done, tried to think impartially.

"If it isn't Hop Kee, who then?"

She looked at the drawer with the clothes tumbled about in confusion, and suddenly she was quite sure that Hop Kee never would have left such a mess. Not even in his greatest haste. Hop Kee was too crafty.

"Perhaps it was Ling Loo," she cried. "He has been going about the house . . . the key to my room upstairs . . . did he hide it? Or was it Hop Kee who had hid it under the carpet? But the key was lost in the morning and I didn't take the pouch out of the trunk until last night. No one could have known I had it." She recalled the scene at dinner last night, when Ling Loo had secreted the dessert in his sleeves. "It must be Ling Loo, and it's in his box, if he took it. I'll ask Muriel if she saw him in the hall this morning."

No, she must not speak to anyone of it. She made a frantic search of the room, but no box was to be found. She must wait until the visitors returned to-morrow and then find some way of questioning Hop Kee, that would not be too open an accusation of his small friend. If the Chinaman did not offer to help her in her search for the box, she would know that he had some share in it. She was so lost in puzzled thought that she did not hear Bob in the hall.

He was rushing up to his room for an old pair

of compasses to show Mr. Bullden. "Come along over to the shop, Rosie. Mew's busy with Miss Snow," he flung in at her. "I'm going to let him see the forge. He says he can tell how old it is. My word, he's a sharp one! Says no one can fool him about dates."

She waited until he came bounding down with the rusty compasses. She hoped he would not notice how queer her voice sounded as she said, "I'll be over in a minute." She needed time to recover.

Bob did not mind. "He's down in Mother's room, throwing a fit over the fire-screens. He says they're not as old as Mother thinks,—the nerve of him, when she saw Great-grandmother Gordon with her own eyes, and it was her mother who used them. He says family dates are all wrong. What do you think of that!"

He did not wait for a reply but disappeared around the corner of the front main hall, where she could hear his voice join the others in argument over the date of the fire-screens. She closed the door behind her and went softly down to the hall below, glad of the brief respite. She must not show how agitated she was, or she would have to give some reason. Fortunately the hall was empty. Through the window she could see Gladys, who had been trying to atone for her outbreak with Hop Kee, raking the back grass-plot, whistling to a tom-tit in the walnut tree. Gladys was a comfortable sight: you knew what she thought and how she felt about things. She was not in the least like Hop Kee.

A man's quick step on the front porch made her

start. Were they coming back so soon? Her heart dropped a beat as she flew to the door, and she gave a little cry when she saw that it was neither Mr. Wong or Mr. Han.

"Did I startle you?" The slim little old man who stood smiling at her cocked his head like a friendly bird. "Yet you must have heard me come up the steps. I was about to ring the bell. I am Dr. Briggs. On a most unprofessional call. I was in the neighborhood. At the Lodge, to be exact. Miss Bump told me you might be at home."

"Do come in, and I'll tell Mrs. Chilton," she said, cordially. "She is upstairs——"

He halted her with a gesture of his birdlike hand. "If she is occupied, I can wait a few minutes. An old fellow like me isn't so spry as you youngsters. A comfortable chair," and he seated himself, "has its appeal to my old bones. Stop a bit till I make an examination. You're Roslyn Blake, they tell me. Any relation of Henry Blake, the explorer?"

"His daughter," she answered, wondering.

"Mother alive?" he demanded with a cock of his head.

"She died when I was four years old," she replied, simply.

"And what are you doing here?"

She told him she was working on her music, and she thought he appeared disappointed. "I am working hard," she assured him. "I mean to go as far as I can."

"Ah," he said, and folded his hands. She thought he had finished and she made a move toward the

stair, when he again detained her. "I knew your father when he was a lad. At Nazareth Hall,—the military Academy, you know. I was assistant in biology and hygiene. For a season before I went to the University. He was a handful, I can tell you. A fine lad. Tell me about him."

She dropped into a chair opposite him and leaned forward, eager to talk of her beloved father, but at this moment Mrs. Chilton came to the landing with Mr. Bullden, to whom she was about to say good-bye. Dr. Briggs rose and bowed, Mrs. Chilton ended her rather cool farewells to the antique expert and came down into the hall.

"This must be Dr. Briggs," she said with cordiality. "I have heard so much of you, Doctor. It is kind of you to come——"

"Not at all, I assure you," smiled the doctor. "I am on Welfare business."

Roslyn saw, out of the tail of her eye, the swift withdrawal of Miss Sarah's friend, whose hungry connoisseur eye had lighted on the hideous Victorian hat-rack in the back-hall and who silently indicated to Bob that he wished to inspect it more closely. Bob followed, glowering, and put a hand on Mr. Bullden's delicate elbow to steer him toward the back-porch. The forge might prove another battle-ground. Roslyn was very glad that she was not urged to go with them, for she hoped that another chance to ask Dr. Briggs about her father's boy-hood might be given her. When she turned to him again, he was speaking of the house.

"I like these old-fashioned places that I've

known most of my life," he remarked, looking about the ornate hall. "It must strike a newcomer as a bit too dickered up, but it looks homey to me. Many's the good time I've had here. Joe Bruce was a good fellow and he liked his friends about him. Pity he lost out at last."

Mrs. Chilton murmured something about a sad end to a full life, but he merely cocked his head and went on with his own thoughts. "Lost out. Yes. Because he had principles. He took the hard path of honesty. I knew. I was with him. Poor Joe. Whoever took that bundle of notes killed him. He'd have weathered through—but you're not interested in this, Mrs. Chilton."

"Did he have no idea of who the thief was?" Mrs. Chilton asked, rather absently. Her mind was occupied with the problem of how much she could afford to contribute to the Welfare Booth, when the doctor would get around to the object of his call.

"Bless you, he was like a child, those last days,—not a thought in his head, except his school-books, and fishing-rods and such, that he used to have when he was a boy. He went rambling all over the house, hunting things he'd remember and then forget all in a minute. But I mustn't go on about Joe Bruce and his misfortunes, poor fellow. I came to ask if you ladies will suggest an idea for decorating our Welfare Booth. Miss Bump usually helps us out with suggestions, when she is at leisure. She is looking for company on Monday and can't give her mind to anything else. 'Where the heart is, there will the treasure be also,' you know."

"I am afraid we will be rather frail reeds to lean on," Mrs. Chilton returned dubiously. "If Muriel——" She broke off to say in a brighter tone, "But we have some East Indian draperies your father sent us once, Roslyn. If they would do, Dr. Briggs, . . . you might make the booth an international affair,—East and West and all around the globe. We could help you in that case."

Dr. Briggs crinkled his brow in thought but as she mentioned the various kinds of draperies and ornaments,—Alaskan wolf rug, Japanese lacquer screen, the Indian draperies and some brass foot-warmers from Persia, he brightened.

"You've saved my life, Mrs. Chilton," he said, rubbing his neat hands together in satisfaction. "I've vetoed every suggestion our ladies have made so far, but this will be the ticket. I wanted something that meant a lot, and this fits the bill. Real stuff, not cheesecloth and satines, and from all nations. A real international affair, as you say. I hope I have not troubled you too much, though." He hesitated. "You see, I ought to have come last night, but I never talk business after 7 p. m. It depresses my circulation."

"You mean that you will need the stuff at once?" Mrs. Chilton asked. "That will be quite all right. We will collect it and send it over to you in half an hour. We know where every article is because we have just moved into the house."

Dr. Briggs was profuse in his thanks. It was a load off his mind, he said, to have it settled. He glanced about as he rose to go, and his eyes fell on

the bookcases on either side of the fireplace. "May I ask another favor?" he inquired. "I see you have a copy of Sandburg's *Lincoln*,—may I glance at it for just a moment? I am going to get it next week, if it looks good to me. I have postponed it time and time again. Biography is the only reading I indulge in now. Biography is, I may confess, my greatest weakness."

He refused the offer of a loan of the book. "No, no. Very kind, but I like to own books. Borrowed books are a care. I am forgetful . . ." he was turning over the pages rapidly as he rambled on. "Biography . . . to borrow a biography is like borrowing a man's shaving-mirror . . . this is fine. I shall get it. 'Lives of great men all remind us, We can make our lives sublime,' as the poet says. Well, good-bye, good-bye, and thank you a hundred times. I'll trot over to tell the ladies that the decorations of the booth are on the way,—from the four corners of the globe. From Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand, as you might say."

Mrs. Chilton looked after him with a smile. "Who does he remind you of, Roslyn?" she asked.

Roslyn did not hesitate. "Mr. Han," she answered. "He is so small and kind and he likes to quote things. Isn't it odd how much alike they are and yet so very different?"

"Neither of them would see the resemblance, I am sure," said Mrs. Chilton. "People never do. But I must go gather the goods together. Will you tell Bob I've pledged his services as expressman?"

Roslyn did not find Bob at the shop. She went to the garage, the stables and the barns without success. She was returning to the house, in the belief that he might have smuggled Mr. Bullden up the back-stairs to his room for another expert opinion on some private possession when she heard the roar of the ancient chariot coming up the steep grade of the lane behind the barns. She ran to the top of the slope and stood, waiting for him to slow down.

"Where in the world have you been?" she asked. "And where is Mr. Bullden?"

"He had to skip for the ten-thirty," Bob shouted to her, understanding rather than hearing her question. "Believe me, I was glad to rush him over. He got it by a hair."

When the raging voice of his beloved had died down, he added with a strange smile, "When a fellow knows too much, I'm through. He told Mother her fire-screens were a late imitation. And he called that grizzly ghost 'a superb example of Victorian artistry' . . . can you beat it?"

He jumped down and left the car standing in the lane by the barn. "Come along to the shop," he said. "I want to show you something."

Inside the shop he closed the door carefully, looked at her with the same strange smile, and pulled out his pocket-book. He counted out two yellow-back notes and one green one and thrust them in her hand. "It's good money," he assured her as she tried to refuse the notes. "I sold the rocker. He offered twenty-five for it on sight. That's the money

for it. I want you to have it. I've got that much for myself ——"

"Did you sell the forge?" she began, when she saw the forge in its place. "What did you sell, Bob? Not your gas-saver?"

"He wasn't looking for modern devices, my child," retorted Bob. "No, he got the candle-stand, out of the ashes by the forge,—the real, old-timer that old Belle's great-grandfather must have read his Bible by. Oh, he gave me a great line on candle-stands ——"

"Bob, you didn't let him think it was old?" she cried.

"I didn't *let* him think it," Bob declared. "I couldn't make him think anything else. Once he got his eye on that stand, he was crazy. Wouldn't believe me. Said I was trying to spoof him. Said it was worth three hundred. So, after putting up with a lot of his raving, I agreed to accept twenty-five dollars for it. I wasn't going to take it at that, but he foamed at the mouth, and I sort of felt I'd like to get a rise out of him, the way he'd behaved to Mother and all. I'll keep the tainted money for my law books. Golly, what an ass he is! I thought at first he knew a lot."

Roslyn laughed and then grew sober. "The candle-stand is worth that much anyway, isn't it?" she asked, rather disturbed.

"Sure," returned Bob, genially. "I'd have got more than that at the Blacksmith Shop in the Fair. if I'd been willing to show such a rotten failure. He's got the worth of his money, though he'll be

ripping when he finds out, as he will some day. He——"

"But, Bob dear, I can't take your money," she protested, suddenly aware that she was holding the notes in her fingers. "It's sweet of you, but I can't," and with a swift gesture, she slipped the money into his coat pocket and fled, while he stood silent and frowning, just where she had left him.

It was too bad he had taken her refusal in that way, she thought, and then, as she remembered her errand, she went lightly back and called in at the open window. He grunted out a gruff "All right" and turned his back on her. She leaned a little further into the shop to repeat her gratitude but he would have none of her. He walked to the forge and began to brush the ashes from it in such a cloud that she choked and withdrew. She knew from past experience that nothing would move him. Until he came out of his dark mood, it was no use to try to make him see reason. So she went back to the house, feeling sorry that she had not been clearer as to her reasons for her refusal of his gift.

"It isn't because that conceited Mr. Bullden paid it to him," she sighed as she went indoors. "It's just that I sponge on anyone. If I can't get along on what I have——"

"Hey, Miss Roselind! Wait a minute, will you?"

It was Gladys at the telephone in the alcove of the back-hall. She held the receiver to her lips while she talked, and Roslyn hurried to cut off the flow of her explanations. "It's Miss Bump and she wants you. She's as funny as the dickens about it.

Won't say what she wants. She's a close one, anyways, for all her nice manners——"

Roslyn had to fairly push her from the alcove, and she put a hand over the receiver as she whispered, "Go up and tell Mrs. Chilton that Mr. Bob says he will take the stuff to Dr. Briggs, Gladys. Hurry, do," and then, as Gladys moved reluctantly away, she took up the 'phone from the stand. "Good morning, Miss Bump," she said, rather out of breath and wanting terribly to laugh at Gladys' crestfallen expression as she mounted the stairs. "Gladys says you asked for me."

Miss Bump's voice came softly over the wire. "Is that Miss Blake? I don't want to make a mistake. I must be quite positive it is Miss Blake that I am addressing. It is of the utmost importance."

"It is Roslyn Blake," and her heart fluttered at the mystery of the soft tones. Had the authoress a clue to the lost necklace? But, no, Miss Bump knew nothing of the necklace—"Yes, it is Roslyn Blake, and no one is near the 'phone. No one can possibly hear."

CHAPTER X

DISCOVERIES

MISS BUMP was most mysterious. She wanted Roslyn to come over to see her. Could it be some new development of the necklace enigma? But, no, Miss Bump was asking her for Friday afternoon, almost a week ahead.

"I want to secure you for that time," she explained. "Let nothing interfere. Come casually, though, and not as if specially invited. And, by the way, you might bring some music to play to me,—a good excuse in case we are found out."

"Found out?" echoed Roslyn, and her heart dropped a beat. Surely this invitation had something to do with the lost treasure.

"Not found out exactly," corrected Miss Bump, in her normal voice, "but in case there might be callers. Say nothing. Be astute, subtle, ingenious. And bring your favorite concerto or fantasia or whatever you like best. We can get better acquainted through that language of the soul," and then she added in a whisper, "Au revoir . . . au revoir . . ." and hung up.

Roslyn sat frowning in the effort to find some satisfactory everyday reason for this strange invitation. Miss Bump was clearly not going to tell her until the proper time came. "It's queer though,

that she didn't wait until Monday to invite me. We are all going to the parade together."

She got up and gave herself a little shake, as if to throw off the uncomfortable spooky feeling that was creeping over her, and she said to herself firmly, "She's too nice to be mixed up with anything horrid, like stealing a necklace. I'd better go up and see if I can help Mew. Miss Snow will be gone by this time." She wanted to forget, if she could, until Hop Kee returned.

Miss Snow's high thin voice came to her as she went to the sewing-room and, as she suddenly decided to take advantage of the few minutes before the seamstress' departure to take another look around her room, in case she had missed a spot where the necklace might be hid, she turned and went into the other hallway. At the door of her temporary bedroom she paused to fasten a button on her cuff that had come undone in her frantic search. Her glance wandered along the row of curtained doors on the opposite side and then came back to Muriel's door, with its bare curtain-pole. She wondered absently whether Mrs. Chilton would remember to get out the blue silk curtains she had promised for the two doors, and then she gave a little cry.

"The sandalwood box!"

There it was, tucked under the edge of the carpet, one corner sticking out, as if hastily thrust into its hiding-place. She dropped on her knees and pulled it out, trembling in her eagerness to see if its contents were safe. The necklace was in its place, unharmed and lovely.

"It was Ling Loo, after all," she said. "Why didn't I think of it before? The little wretch! And what a goose I've been. I'd make a poor detective," and she laughed. "Thank goodness, I don't have to unravel mysteries. I can't even see a thing when it's under my very nose."

Yes, Ling Loo was at the bottom of it, and also of the mystery of the missing door-key. How thankful she was that she had not spoken to Muriel. She must find a new hiding-place, though, where mischievous Ling Loo could not find it. Her trunk was the best place, after all. As she locked the trunk and put the key in her pocket, she blessed Mrs. Chilton for her forgetfulness of the blue silk curtains which Muriel had asked for more than once. If the curtains had been hung, she could not have noticed the hump in the carpet beyond the doorway.

When she came down again, Miss Snow had gone, Mrs. Chilton had assembled the goods for the Welfare Booth, and Bob had begun to carry the bundles out to his car. He did not look at her and she could see that he had been deeply hurt by her refusal of his gift. In her great thankfulness that the necklace was safe she felt doubly sorry for the wound she had made. She caught up a parcel of Persian prints that Mrs. Chilton had added to the collection and went out to the car. Bob edged away, without looking at her.

"It was lovely of you to want to give me part of your money, Bob," she said, stepping in front of him to block his escape. "I've changed my mind. If

you still want to give me a present, I'd love to have some music. You buy it for me. I've been wanting *The Moonlight Sonata* and Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*, and I'm pretty poor just now."

He turned around to her then with his face still clouded. "You're just trying to make me feel good," he said, rather crossly. "You can get all the music you want,—canned or paper stuff ——"

"Indeed I can't. I have to save like mad now," she began and halted. She must not burden Bob with her private worriments. "I have enough, of course, but I've got to save for something, and music is so expensive. I really can't afford to get any just now."

He stared at her intently. "I guess you're not spoofing me," he said slowly. "It must be true,—what the Governor was saying about your funds being low. All right," and his face cleared, "I'll get the music. You write down what you want and I'll get it. I'm going to town next week. Or maybe you'd better come along and pick it out yourself. I might make a mess of it."

"Fine," she agreed, happy that he was himself again. "We'll make a picnic of it, you and I, and perhaps you'll treat to lunch and a movie." As an afterthought she added, "I'll go see Capponi, too. It'll be gorgeous, Bobs."

He waved gaily to her as he started the engine with a roar that might have been heard at the Cross-roads, and she went indoors, smiling to herself. Everything was smoothed out now; suspicion had been banished, she was at peace with Bob, and she

had begun to write out the words of the Operetta, adapting them from the old story-book version,—life was full of splendid surprises.

"When Mr. Chilton told me I couldn't go to Loring, I wouldn't have believed I could be so happy in such a short time," she thought.

She found nothing in the next two days to disturb her contentment: she helped Muriel with sewing, discussed the gas-saver and the perversity of antique dealers with Bob, made a rice-curry in Indian style for Mrs. Chilton, trimmed a hat for Gladys to wear for Old Home Week, and got on famously with her own work. New energy came to her out here in this country where she had the freedom of the hills and the comradeship of the mountain streams. She walked miles that afternoon on the rutted lanes, safe from the fears that had beset her in those other hill-countries she had known. Here a girl would find neither bandits nor adders, but only grazing cows and sheep and little laughing streams of water and over all a high clean mountainy wind that held a tang of fairies and forgotten childish dreams in it.

It was not hard to write out the words for the Ali Baba operetta, within the sight of Fortune Hill and with her old thumbed book of fairy stories before her. She had two pages done by dinner that night and believed she could easily finish that part of her work in another week, working at it off and on between the song writing.

After church the next morning she got out another page. By five o'clock in the afternoon when the chug of the Wong motor sounded below, she had

two more pages of dialogue, and an idea for the third chorus. If she could only put the songs and choruses into proper form for the stringed quartette! That was the hardest job she had ever attempted. She made a crude essay at an arrangement of the first song,—the one she had played for Mrs. Clunk and Gladys,—on some hastily ruled sheets of paper.

"Let me see . . . one violin takes the highest part . . . the second violin takes the lower part of that strain . . . the viola comes next down the scale, and the 'cello is the lowest. . . . Where does the voice come in? Oh, yes, between the viola and the 'cello . . . let me see . . . it should go . . ."

They called her down to dinner before she had got the arrangement for the two violins for the first line of the song, and she flung down the paper with alacrity. She had had enough of orchestration for the time. "I'll write the libretto and get the airs for the songs and choruses worked out, before I tackle that part," she thought, as she hastily washed her hands and straightened her hair. "Mr. Capponi was right,—I'll need help when it comes to writing the music for those four instruments."

She ran downstairs, suddenly determined to seek aid as soon as might be possible and her last thought as she entered the dining-room was that she would try to have the songs, which she had already roughly written, done over neatly on the printed music paper before Bob should take her to town. No use to waste time fussing over something she wasn't quite clear about. Capponi said that all the students

would have criticisms on their work and she need not be an exception.

The others were seated but Mr. Wong and Mr. Han rose to make their ceremonious bows and to offer greetings. They seemed quite like old friends, after their absence of a day and a half, and she found herself honestly glad to see them again. Mr. Wong turned to his friend as they were again seated and finished what he had been saying before Roslyn's entrance.

"'Man is born for uprightness,' says the Master K'ung-fu-tsze, and I contend that if one is not upright for the love of truth, there is no light within him. He is in darkness," he said very earnestly. "There is no half-way in the Path of Virtue."

Roslyn thought to herself as she looked at his wrinkled intelligent face, "And I was ready to believe he could stoop to a mean action. I was willing to think he had put Hop Kee up to taking my necklace. It was only for a minute, but I did think it." To make amends for her base suspicions she put out every effort to show Mr. Han the utmost respect and confidence during the meal and for the half-hour that they all lingered in the reception-hall together afterward.

He seemed pleased with her friendliness and responded cordially. He told her of his friend Krantz, and of the music Krantz wrote. Like the breath of the flowery spring-time in the young cherry branches, he said.

"Yet to see him when he is composing does not suggest those flowery musics. It is not so poetical,"

he added, with a smile. "He writes and tears the sheets and casts them upon the floor. It is like a snow-storm on Kuen-lun. It was better when he allowed me to copy his rough notes. I enjoy the exactitude of the written score."

"Oh, can you arrange the parts of a score?" The words popped out of themselves.

He made a negative gesture with his delicate hand. "I enjoy the task of copying the music, but I have not the great happiness to be able to create harmonies,—that is too celestial a labor for my poor talents."

Muriel broke into their talk. "Do any of you know who is coming to stop with Miss Bump to-morrow?" she asked. "Gladys said it was someone important,—a count or prince from Paris."

"Dr. Briggs told us that she was expecting guests and was much occupied," her mother said, as she poured the after-dinner coffee. "That is all I know of it."

Gladys, tray in hand, was standing at her elbow in decorous silence; as she bent to receive the cup, she murmured something in Mrs. Chilton's ear. "Gladys says she heard who it is," Mrs. Chilton smiled. "Won't you repeat the name, Gladys? I didn't catch it."

"I don't guess I got it straight, but it sounds like her name was Popsky-wopsky," replied Gladys, suddenly embarrassed by the fact that they were all looking at her. "I ain't good on foreign languages myself," and she carried the first cup of coffee to Bob, instead of to Roslyn or Muriel, blushing deeply

as she did so. She felt the name could not be right, though when she had told it at home to her mother, it had not sounded ridiculous. That was the way it went,—things sounded all right in one place and queer in another. . . .

Mr. Wong laughed with the rest but he said, hastily, "That is near enough, Gladys, for me to guess who it is. I think Miss Bump's important guest must be the Countess Povovski. I knew her in Paris and I remember she said she was coming over to collaborate with an American author on a translation of some of the author's books into Polish. Girls' books or romances or some such."

"A countess!" exclaimed Bob in alarm. "Count me out for that tea-party over there on Tuesday, Mums. Miss Bump isn't so bad, now that you know her, but a countess would be the limit. I shouldn't know whether to call her 'Your Honor' or 'Your Grace' or just plain 'Countess'——"

"Bob!" cried Muriel blushing. "You talk as if you were a perfect heathen. Mother, don't let him back out. Miss Bump said she specially wanted him to come. She needs some new slang, she said, for her next story, not really tough talk but nice up-to-date slang——"

"That settles it," interrupted Bob, emphatically. "Wild horses wouldn't drag me there. I won't be butchered to make a Bump holiday. I can see the nobility at the Parade. Gee! I'm glad they came, so she couldn't go with us. I'm no side-show."

Muriel sighed and then laughed. "Never mind, Bobs, you may not be the hero at the tea-party but

Miss Bump will get you,—see if she doesn't. You'll go down to fame in her next book, or I'm mistaken. She'll have you talking to her before you know it."

"Never!" cried Bob, reddening. "I'll be an oyster when she's about. You'll see."

And to prove his powers of restraint he did not utter another word until he said good-night to them in the hall, and then he was brevity itself.

"I got her working fine, Mr. Wong. About eight, if that suits."

Mr. Wong nodded. "Good. I'll be over at eight," he replied. "Thanks awfully for being so prompt."

Mrs. Chilton looked mildly surprised at this dialogue but Muriel was quick when it came to practical matters. She leaned across the settee where she sat and murmured in Roslyn's ear, "He must have been making a gas-saver for Mr. Wong's car. That was why he wouldn't go for a walk with me this afternoon. Isn't he dreadful!"

Mr. Wong caught the gist of what she was saying,—he seemed to have great interest in her conversation,—and he came over to her, while Mrs. Chilton and Mr. Han began to discuss the work of the Welfare Booth during the coming week. He smiled down on her and, though he included Roslyn in his explanation, his whole interest was in Muriel.

"It is my fault, I am afraid, that the gas-saver had to be finished to-day," he said. "I wanted to try it out to-morrow morning. I am going to slip off for a run over to New York and thought it a

good time for a try-out, as I know how much gas the car needs to get there. On Saturday we tested it coming and going."

Roslyn thought, "So they went to New York on Saturday and not to the silk mills at Windham and Philadelphia, as we rather thought they had." Aloud she said, merely to say something, "The gas-saver ought to work better on your car. Bob's fiery chariot has so many loose parts that it loses power all the time, and it's uncertain, too. Sometimes it shoots uphill in high and the next slope it has to pant along in low."

"I think it's remarkable how much you know, Mr. Wong, about machines," said Muriel as she lifted her innocent blue eyes to his animated face. "I never can understand them. Roslyn can drive splendidly, but I don't know whether a carburetor is in the back axle or the clutch is part of the brakes. . . ."

He was quite ready to explain the structure of an automobile to her, and Roslyn moved away to allow him to take her place next to Muriel, who listened earnestly to his illuminating words. Roslyn smiled to herself as she went upstairs.

"Dear old Mew," she thought, fondly, as if Muriel were the younger instead of being her senior by four years. "She'll make that handsome young man think he's the cleverest thing outside an auto factory. She doesn't mean to flatter them but she simply can't help it. She was born that way."

She glanced down as she reached the landing. Muriel was drinking in the words of Mr. Wong as if

she had thirsted for instruction on motors all her life, unsatisfied till now. That she was genuinely impressed by his cleverness, Roslyn had not a doubt. Muriel always allowed men to instruct her, for she really felt that they were superior beings,—save in the matters of dress and housekeeping. Mr. Wong had the air of having found an intelligent listener to whom he could express himself at length.

The music-paper came in the morning mail and Roslyn spent the hours until luncheon transcribing the air of the song. She inked in the notes of the air on the third staff; the two upper staves were to be used for first and second violins, and the viola, while the fourth staff would have the 'cello parts written on it. She looked at it when she had finished the song and felt some chagrin at the emptiness of the paper.

"After all, I've hardly made a start," she thought. "The hard part is yet to come. Anyone could get up some songs and choruses but to write a score for a stringed quartette is—*terrible.*"

She laid down the sheets and went to the window. A tiny figure climbed about the roofs below. It was Ling Loo, without his brocade coat and clad in a tiny sweater, exploring the iron fretwork along the apex of the porch-roofs. As she looked, Hop Kee came out and called him away. She was reminded of her necklace and was glad that she had solved the mystery of its disappearance. She gave a start. Had she been too quick in her explanation of the theft? The closed door of the room downstairs came back to her with a sense of shock.

Ling Loo might clamber about dangerous roofs and might stow away his treasures in boxes and under the edges of carpets but how could Ling Loo open a closed door, whose knob was out of reach for him?

She went down so slowly that her footsteps were inaudible on the thick velvet carpet of the stairs and at the turn she halted, amazed and then, swiftly, amused. Ling Loo hung by his tail to the curtain-pole in Muriel's doorway and with his tiny black paws he was tugging at the door-knob. He was so intent that he did not notice her, and she stood motionless, waiting to see whether he could open the door. If he did, he had been the thief. If he could not turn the knob, then ——

The knob clicked and the door swung open, and Roslyn sprang forward.

"You bad thing!" she cried. "Come here at once. Don't dare go into other people's bedrooms," but she was laughing with relief, and she carried Ling Loo down to the table for a bit of banana as a treat. "Such a little wretch," she said to Mrs. Chilton and Muriel. "What do you think he has been doing?"

They laughed over his cleverness, though it meant taking more trouble about their doors. Muriel declared she would get Hop Kee to let her take him with her to the Circus Parade that afternoon. "He'll make a sensation with his brocade coat, and he's really very good and quiet, if he has his little padded belt on. He seems to know that he hasn't any chance to get away when you have the chain

in your hand. I took him to the barns with me this morning and he was as good as gold."

"Hop Kee may not allow him to go for so long," remarked Mrs. Chilton, as she shook out her napkin. "Send him away now, please, Roslyn, and get your lunch. Mr. Wong said he would be back with the car for us at half-after one promptly. I am rather glad that Miss Bump's company came and she had to make other arrangements, for I love to have you with us, my dear. Not that"—she added hastily,—"I do not admire Miss Bump. But I love to have my children about me."

Roslyn's heart overflowed at that last sentence . . . her children . . . dear Mrs. Chilton. . . . She got up and went around the table to kiss the little white triangle of neck behind Mrs. Chilton's ear,—she was so moved.

"You know," went on Mrs. Chilton, softly, "that I have felt you were actually one of my own family since last spring when——" she caught herself up and added, more briskly, "But we must hurry or we will be late. Shall you wear your brown suit, Muriel, or the grey one? We are to be rather conspicuous, you know. Everyone will be staring at Mr. Wong and his party. I should not wish him to feel that we were without taste. Roslyn, my dear, your fingers are all black with ink. If you have nothing to clean them with, get the blue bottle from my medicine closet; Gladys, the tea, please. We have just half an hour . . ."

CHAPTER XI

OLD HOME WEEK

"HERE they come," exclaimed Muriel. "Look, there's a camel!"

Mrs. Chilton and Mr. Han peered out over the shoulders of Roslyn and Bob who were on the small folding seats of Mr. Wong's blue limousine. "I see only flags and banners and the crowd along the curb," said Mrs. Chilton, with a laugh.

"The estimable Chairman of the Committee of Welcome completely blocks my view for the present," smiled Mr. Han. "Otherwise I should observe the august ship of the desert, as an old friend. We of the house of Wong have seen many camels come and go in our caravans."

Bob turned about in surprise. "Are you one of the Wongs? I thought you were just a friend——" He broke off as he caught Roslyn's signal. "Not that I mean to be too nosey," he added. "Hark, the band's coming! Gee, look at that old horse. He don't like music. Rosie, you ought to reform him. See, the band's getting ahead of Mew's camel,—if there is a camel down there among all that push."

There was a great blare of brasses and drums as the Belleview Military Band took their place at the head of the line. Whatever might follow them in way of splendor, the Military Band could hardly

be outshone. The organization had adopted its name first and then made up a uniform to suit; they had drawn on the uniforms of all nations to produce a grand effect. Great hairy shakos overshadowed their faces; scarlet and gold braid clothed their upper parts; shining boots and pale blue trousers encased them below the waist-band of darker blue which encircled their manly bodies. Mr. Hopkins poked his head in the window of the car to tell Mr. Wong how much each suit had cost.

"It 'most broke us," he said proudly, "but we wouldn't let any other measly band get ahead of us. Jonesville couldn't stand the pace and their poor shrimps are a sorry sight indeed, in their blue pants and white coats. See, they're waiting over there in the side street. Don't think much of that lot, myself. How does our band show up alongside those European and Chinese fellows?"

Mr. Wong laughingly assured him that the Belleview Band was the most gorgeous he had ever seen, and Hopkins dropped off to hurry to another car, where he talked earnestly with Mr. Horn of the *Spirit*. Mr. Horn accepted items in praise of Belleview at so much a line, and he hoped to reap a harvest from this celebration, for it was clearly understood that there would be scant mention of Old Home Week events unless the flattering articles were paid for in good hard cash.

The band passed in magnificent form, cheeks puffed and eyes staring, and then came the first camel, laden with wheat-sheaves, corn-stalks, and grape-vines,—symbols of Belleview's plenty. This

noble animal, with its small head held high and a sneer upon its lips, as if contemptuous of all this childish business, passed and was followed at an interval by the Red Cross, in white aprons and flowing veils,—a contrast that pleased the applauding citizens. The Fife and Drum Corps of the Boy Scouts had its share of the cheering, but all the applause that had been given was a mere whisper compared to the outburst that greeted the next in line.

"Ah-h," said Mr. Wong, "so that's where the beggar disappeared to . . ."

"And that's why I couldn't find Ling Loo!" cried Muriel.

A second camel strode into sight, amid the shouts of the Belleview people and even some few hand-claps from the Jonesvillians. He was draped with oriental splendor of red and gold and blue and green, that looked as well as if it had been the real thing instead of the favorite satines and cheesecloths of the village Dramatic Club. On his hump sat Hop Kee, in a glistening green silk coat and with a gold skull-cap on his bony head. Ling Loo sat on the neck of the camel, in his blue coat, and he wore a new red cap with yellow bindings and a big white pompom.

"My word," exclaimed Wong. "The beggar has nerve. Look at your coat, Han. He ought to be flogged. I'll ship him back to China to-morrow."

"I made him a gift of that despicable garment, my dear friend," Han answered serenely. "He begged it for the Ball where he is to wait upon the

tea-table. I did not know he contemplated wearing it so soon."

Roslyn wondered if she were mistaken in feeling that Mr. Han would always protect the servant, even though he were in fault, but the parade was passing and she had no time to speculate on Hop Kee's influence over his employers. The Circus Parade was extremely short,—two camels, the old, weary elephant from a small private zoo near Phillipsburg and a cage of grey foxes captured on Fortune Hill last winter, four great Percheron mares from the Folly Stock Farms made up that part of the parade. The rest of the long line was composed of a few floats, and an interminable string of automobiles from all parts of the countryside. The two Belleview floats passed amid roars of delight, the Orland exhibit drew less enthusiasm, and the Jonesville express-truck, draped with the red and green of the baseball team and filled with representative citizens in their best clothes, got only lukewarm cheers.

"They're not very polite," remarked Muriel. "They ought to give their enemies a rousing welcome——"

She broke off as a tumult of hand-clapping began all about them. The villagers had repented, it seemed. The Jonesville Pastor and Burgess bowed and waved their hats gracefully; but it was not for them that the applause was meant. Roslyn saw, with a sinking heart, the cause for the outburst.

Mr. James Chilton, in the station taxi, was next in line between the Jonesville truck and the Milton

Fire Brigade, and he bowed right and left with a regal air, as he progressed up the street toward the reviewing stand just opposite where Wong's machine was parked. Mrs. Chilton made a muffled sound that might be joy or annoyance, Bob leaned forward with a gasp, and Muriel said, with innocent surprise, "Why, there's Father. He never told us he was going to be in the parade."

The Honorable James halted the taxi before the stand, got out, quickly paid grinning Tim, bowed to the Belleview worthies assembled on the stand and crossed to where his family waited. His long horse face looked longer than ever and a smile pulled at the corners of his lips. He was evidently much pleased with himself for he greeted them with a particularly gracious wave of the hand.

"I had difficulty in pressing into that horde, but I was determined that no set of yokels should detain me," he explained to Mr. Wong. "Fancy sitting at the tail of a line of rustic conveyances until it pleased them to move on. I took matters into my own hands as usual and ——"

"Father, you didn't ——" cried Muriel and was silent. She knew well there was no use finishing her speech,—the Honorable James would not hesitate to rebuke her before strangers. Bob, scarlet to his fair hair, still stared in front of him, as if absorbed in the parade, which had dwindled to an exhibit of fire-horses and the new ambulance at the head of the long line of private automobiles which had blocked his father's progress. Mr. Chilton tapped him on the shoulder.

"Robert, may I ask you to allow me to occupy your chair?" he inquired with sardonic blandness. "Your legs are younger than mine, I believe, and fresh air will do you good."

He ignored their protests that there was plenty of room for him on the back seat, and installed himself in Bob's place with a sigh of satisfaction. "It is good to be able to afford a decent car," he said to Mr. Wong. "I have not had one for four years."

Roslyn squirmed in her seat. If he were going to proclaim his poverty she would leave, for that was the side of him that she most disliked. She opened the door at her side and was in the street before they could protest. "I am going about with Bob," she said, and walked quickly away, before the voice of authority could recall her.

It was much better out in the bright air, with the motion of the excited straggling crowds all about her. Bob, too, was glad he had been thrust from Paradise. "Mew and Mother like to sit still," he remarked as she slipped her hand in his arm. "They don't know what they're missing, though. Say, who's that sweet baby-elephant over there in the pink thingummy? She's nodding at you to beat the band. Gosh, there's that Gladys alongside of her,—let's get out."

He dragged Roslyn into the next street, a narrow mean street of decaying stables and dusty one-story warehouses, and kept her there until the crowds had surged up Main Street, taking Gladys and her mother with them. He peered out cautiously and his face cleared.

"Come along," he said. "Show's about over. Let's have a sundae at the Palace of Sweets and then beat it home. I've got something to do before the others get back. His Lordship said something about taking them for a little run out into the country. I don't know,—now that Father is here . . ."

Over their ice-cream in the crowded sweet-shop she asked him why he was so afraid of Gladys. He frowned, and swallowed a large spoonful of chocolate sauce.

"She's crazy," he said, gloomily. "Got the Hollywood bug. She ought to go out there, where the men are all heroes."

Not another word would he say, though she teased him to tell what Gladys had been saying to him. Evidently Mrs. Clunk's pretty daughter had tried to make a hero of Bob, just for practice.

When they came into the street again, they saw the Wong car in front of the Welfare Booth, and Roslyn had a glimpse of Mr. Han and Dr. Briggs in close chat. She thought, "Yes, they ought to be friends,—they are so much alike." But she was glad that none of the party observed Bob and herself as they slipped away among the dispersing crowds. Mr. Chilton had his back turned in their direction or they might not have escaped.

Roslyn left Bob and went into the music-room. She was glad to have the house to herself while she tried some harmonies for the first chorus. "I make such inhuman sounds, groping around for those parts for the violins," she thought, with a little laugh.

She was soon so absorbed in her efforts to capture a line or two for the score of Ali Baba that she was not aware how time fled. It must have been half an hour later that she glanced absently out of the window toward the drive. By the fountain Gladys was talking earnestly with a dapper young man who appeared to be deeply interested. Another hero,—this time a complete stranger, to judge by his clothes—for he was almost as well-groomed as Mr. Wong, though he lacked the height and manner of that attractive young man. Roslyn smiled and went on with her troublesome grouping of chords, and when Gladys popped her head in at the door some minutes later, she had forgotten both maid and man in her melody.

"I'm busy, Gladys," she began over her shoulder, and then she saw the disappointment on the other's face, and swung about on the bench. "What is it, another Prince in disguise?" she laughed. "I saw you out there."

"Lands! no. He's askin' after Miss Bump," responded Gladys, eagerly. "He must be a beau of hern; he was so sort of hankerin'——"

"Don't be silly," interrupted Roslyn, with one hand on the keys. "Those movies have made you a perfect goose. He's probably a book-agent."

"No, siree, he isn't that sort," retorted Gladys with spirit. "He was askin' about her real personal-like. Wanted to know if she was good-natured and what colors she liked, and whether she liked mountains or seashore best; oh, a lot of things like that. I told him she had a tender heart——"

"You never did!" cried Roslyn.

"Yep. And it perked him up like anything. He smiled sort of proud-like and said, 'That's the stuff. She can't be too tender for me. I'll just mention that I'm hopin' for the holy bonds of matrimony,' or somepin like that. I tell you it was lovely to see how he hearted up."

"And you promised to ask Miss Bump to see him," Roslyn pounced on the fact. "But you can't while she has company. She'd hate to be bothered by a silly fellow. You know how it bores her to have people tagging after her, particularly out here."

Gladys sniffed airily. "I never seen a lady who'd run away from a nice young man," she remarked, and disappeared without pledging herself.

Roslyn turned to the keyboard and let her fingers ramble idly; she must play something strong and spirited in order to get back into the musical mood again after Gladys' sentimental nonsense. She struck into Rachmaninoff's *Troika,* with its snow and sleigh-bells, and drifted into *The Fountain,* delicate and lovely, and then began the Lohengrin *Prelude,* when suddenly she was conscious of someone in the room.

She whirled about to face Mr. Wong who was sitting in a low chair just inside the door. He looked at her without apology or pretense. "You have the Voice," he said, simply, as to one who understood.

"The Voice?" she questioned. She knew he meant she had done well.

"We call it so, when the player speaks the message the Music-maker has hoped to send out," he

replied, gravely. "Your music is faulty—that piano is rather difficult—but you understand the meaning of it. Has Han heard you play? No, certainly not, or he would have spoken of it. Pray play for us to-night. It will give us much pleasure."

"I'll be glad to, if Mr. Chilton doesn't stay downstairs," she replied, happy in his appreciation. "He cannot bear my playing. He sometimes allows me to play his accompaniments, when he brings out his violin, but ——"

"He seems to be a rather odd person." Wong came over to the piano and spoke in a low tone. "Is he quite all right?" and he tapped his forehead.

"Oh, quite," she assured him with a rueful smile. "He's really very clever ——" She broke off at the sound of the familiar heavy tread.

The Honorable James stood in the doorway, smiling his best smile. "Ah, enjoying music," he remarked. "I missed you, Mr. Wong. I wanted to show you some books, old ones, and valuable. 'The British Theater,' a collection of plays by Farquhar, Colly Cibber and others. You will be interested, I am sure."

He hooked his arm in Mr. Wong's and steered him from the room, without a word to Roslyn, as if she had been at fault in keeping Mr. Wong from his more interesting society. She was used to his ways, however, and it did not annoy her. Much more to the point was the fact that Mr. Wong had liked her playing. So few people, who were judges of music, had heard her play that to be commended by one

meant much to her. She went to the cabinet where the music had been hurriedly stowed away and began to rummage for the selection from *In a Persian Garden*. If she were asked and if she had time before the bridge game that Muriel had arranged, she could play that pretty well.

She was unaware that the rest of the party, except the Honorable James and Mrs. Chilton, had gone upstairs to get ready for dinner. She rummaged through the pack of well-worn sheets, lost in memories that each one raised. Her father, Capponi, the little English music-master in Bangkok, and a host of others. The harsh voice of Mr. Chilton broke in on her abstraction. He was standing outside the music-room and could see Roslyn in her corner quite plainly. Delicacy, however, was not his chief virtue.

"My love, do you observe how the wind blows in a certain quarter? We may lose our little daughter. I believe the young man is, as you may say, caught,—captivated."

Mrs. Chilton's gentle voice was cool. "Our guests have been here only a few days. Muriel is hospitable, nothing more. Roslyn dear, will you tell Gladys that I will be out to see about dinner as soon as I change my dress?"

Roslyn stuffed the music into the cabinet and went on her errand. The master of the house moved to the hearth, where he stood looking after his wife. His eyebrows were twitching with amusement, and his long lip was drawn down. He had not done with the subject.

He brought it up again at dinner in his suggestions to his wife. "My love, you must let Muriel show Mr. Wong the tablecloth you mentioned to me. It may interest him."

"Roslyn has the cloth, Father," interposed Muriel, who was quite unconscious of her father's match-making moves. "It really isn't very interesting."

Mr. Han bent his head sideways and spread out his hands in a gesture of amusement at his own curiosity. "I should be gratified to see the labor of that beautiful Miss Bruce, who, as you say, died in Hong Kong so long ago. May I ask your amiable condescension, Miss Roslyn, after dinner? I should like to scrutinize that cloth."

Mr. Chilton waved the subject aside. "Nothing worth while, after all," he assured Mr. Wong, who had remained silent. "The commonplace work of a commonplace politician's daughter. Your own respected mother, Mr. Wong, would doubtless make an article well worth exhibition. Like all Chinese ladies."

"My mother was an American," Mr. Wong said quietly. "She does not embroider. She dislikes needlework."

"Ah, an American," the Honorable James seized on this fact with avidity. "That must account for your perfect accent. Save that you use excellent English, your speech is the fac-simile of our own young men. No trace of accent. Born to the language, as one might say."

Mr. Wong looked grave. "I have never spoken

Chinese since I left the country where I was born," he said, rather to Mrs. Chilton than to her husband. "I have reasons for wishing to forget that learned and ancient language. It is a matter of principle with me to speak no tongue but that of my dear mother. Mr. Han understands and pardons my attitude. And I must tell you, Madame, that I am not here for a visit. I have come to stay. I took out my first papers immediately on landing. I shall become an American citizen."

"But first papers mean nothing," began Mr. Han impulsively. "You can let them lapse——"

"I shall become an American citizen," repeated Mr. Wong gently. "You, my dear Han, will live to be glad of it. I have arranged all for the best."

Roslyn saw Han fold his hands and cast down his eyes, as if he had received a blow, a blow which perhaps he had been expecting yet which hit him hard. When he looked up, he was his normal quiet self, and could smile at Mr. Chilton as he ended his speech of welcome to the prospective citizen.

Mr. Chilton wound up his harangue with a heavy jest. "And may we hope you will settle, for a time at least, in the neighborhood of your business interests? There were many young ladies casting pretty glances in your direction this afternoon, and you might not find it hard to choose."

Bob suddenly snickered and choked in his napkin. Ling Loo had noiselessly mounted the sideboard back of Mr. Chilton and was imitating him to the life. He skipped to the floor, ran up the chair-back and perched on Mr. Chilton's shoulder, whistling

and holding out his paws for food. The thunder that had gathered on the master's brow died out and he offered Ling Loo a bit of the cake he was eating.

"Wild animals have an unerring instinct for their true friends," he remarked pompously. "Nature despises shams. Muriel, my pet, did you show our guests your water-color drawings? Her professors, Mr. Wong, assured me that she had great talent."

"Oh, Father, they thought me a perfect dunce," Muriel protested, blushing crimson. "Mr. Gill used to touch up my landscapes, because they wouldn't pass unless he did. I put them all in the fire before we moved, thank fortune. Roslyn knows they were no good. And Mother, too. They were dreadful, really!"

They all joined in an effort to soothe her agitated feelings. She looked so pretty and so embarrassed that Roslyn wished she might have power to put the Honorable James into the same plight. "But he'd never get worked up over anything," she thought. "He hasn't enough heart. Poor Mew, she'll be in for it now. He's going to make her life miserable about Mr. Wong."

Roslyn was right in her fears, so far as that evening was concerned. After the tablecloth had been shown, to the accompaniment of some more slighting remarks about rural senators and their families, he showed no tendency to depart to his own quarters. When Mr. Wong asked Roslyn to play for them, the master of the house got out his violin and called Roslyn to accompany him. He adapted his playing to humor the vagaries of the instrument and

the effect was remarkably good. He had applause enough to satisfy even his vanity. He played until it was time for them to arrange the tables for bridge, and then he refused Mr. Han's offer to discuss the British theater and seated himself at the bridge table, opposite his wife.

"We will allow the young couple to try their skill against us, my love," he said, drawing in a long whistling breath through his arrogant nose. "If their skill is as well matched as their appearance, we shall have to fight hard."

Mrs. Chilton was in distress because he had taken Roslyn's place. She knew it was useless to offer her own seat, for there had been one occasion in the past when she had brought down her husband's wrath by such an offer. She glanced at Roslyn, who smiled and shook her head, saying aloud, "I must go back to my work. I've wasted a lot of time to-day. The Parade was fun, though."

Mr. Chilton was drumming on the table while he waited impatiently for Muriel, who was rather slow, to deal the cards. He must have known what he had done but he gave no sign. He filled the interval with instructive conversation, directed to Mr. Wong.

"The Greeks understood harmony, but it was St. Ambrose of Milan in 374 A. D. who introduced the simpler scale suitable for church music, though he was overshadowed by the great Gregory in the sixth century,—Muriel, my child, you dropped a card. That is bad luck for your side,—it is interesting to recall, Mr. Wong, that the first comic opera was written by a hunchback in 1240. . . ."

Roslyn fled upstairs. She had heard those speeches too many times before. She could hear Bob moving about in his room as she passed but he did not open his door, so she went on to her own room and spent the rest of the evening with her books. When she heard the others go to their separate apartments, she laid aside her studies and went down to the tower chamber, where she found gentle Muriel in tears.

"I am so ashamed of Father," she declared in an undertone, as she crushed her moist handkerchief into a ball between her palms. "He asked Mr. Wong if I wasn't an ideal partner, and then he said something about the game of bridge and the game of life. Oh, dear, if he only wouldn't! I shan't go to the Ball, if he keeps on like this. I'd be thinking everybody knew what he's been saying."

"Never mind, he may be off on another idea tomorrow," Roslyn said, not too respectful in her tone. "He's that way, you know. You're not going to miss the Ball, though, no matter how"—she was going to say *how horrid,*—"how much he teases you——"

"Teases!" broke in Muriel, indignantly. "He's in deadly earnest. That's what makes it so bad. No, I certainly shan't go to the Ball, unless he changes. And I do so want to go! The green dress is going to be lovely, and I've never led the Grand March at a large party."

"We're all going," Roslyn assured her. "And we're going to the Woman's Club for tea, and the play by the Dramatic Society and the dinner at

Miss Bump's to-morrow. Wasn't it sweet of her to invite us all? Such a big party in her little house."

Muriel looked at her in surprise. "Didn't Mother tell you that the Countess can't stand big dinners? Miss Bump came over to the Parade after you left. She was terribly cut up about it. We're to go over for a little while to-morrow afternoon—just us three, no men,—she doesn't know Mr. Wong, after all. She said she didn't want to see anyone she'd have to talk sense to. She must be an original character."

"Suits me just as well," laughed Roslyn, as she went to the adjoining bedroom. "I'd rather keep the yellow silk for the real ball. Formal dinners aren't much fun, anyway. Unless you can dance."

Muriel was very silent as she went about her room getting ready for bed, and Roslyn fell into a reverie by her window. She had raised the sash and the cold, sweet air brought the sparkle of starlight into her lungs as she leaned out to breathe it in. Someone was moving about on the porch below, unseen yet audible. She wondered if Mr. Chilton were still pursuing his younger guest, and she listened for the fraction of a second. It was not her habit to be an eavesdropper but she simply could not help it.

"I may as well tell you that I have cabled her to come."

It was Wong's voice, and the anxious tones of Mr. Han broke in on him, raised beyond their usual decorous level. "You cabled? In cipher, but your

honored grandmother may intercept it. She will never allow her to come——"

Roslyn drew her head in and closed the window. She felt as if she had received a shock.

"He must have a wife in China," she thought, in dismay. "And she's coming here. Oh, if I could only tell Muriel. She ought to know, for she's beginning to like him a lot. What shall I do?"

She could do nothing, for she actually knew nothing. Mr. Wong's wife might never come. The grandmother, all-powerful in the Chinese family, might even summon Mr. Wong back to his family. He was not an American citizen yet. . . .

"I'll have to try to make her dislike him," she thought, helplessly, "but I don't know how to do it."

Suddenly she recalled Mr. Wong's distaste for his host's light remarks about himself and Muriel at the bridge table, and she knew that Mr. Wong himself would be her best ally. He would not allow himself to be drawn into the position of an admirer of Muriel. He liked her, of course, they all did, but it went no farther than that.

"Thank goodness he is like that," she thought. And after she was in bed she added, "Mr. Han must have come over to see him made into an American. He is going back and so is Hop Kee. They must be remarkably fond of him." She smiled in a drowsy way. "That necklace of mine won't trouble me now. No fear of its being stolen again. To-morrow we'll see the Countess Pavalska . . . her name wasn't Povovski at all. . . ."

CHAPTER XII

COUNTESS PAVALSKA

"And now tell me about yourself. We have a few minutes together, and we must get acquainted. Where have you lived before this?"

They were in the small boudoir. Miss Bump had taken Mrs. Chilton and Muriel upstairs to show her new autumn frocks, and the Countess had detained Roslyn.

"I must not be left alone," she said. "Stay with me. Dresses are not important. Let us chat. Where did you go to school?"

Countess Pavalska,—she was not the countess Mr. Wong had met in Paris she told them at once, pronouncing her name carefully for them,—was short and thin, with a worn kind face and a most charming manner. Her hair was beautiful but carelessly arranged. She wore flat shoes and tapped the floor nervously as she listened to what was said.

"I went to school in Canada," Roslyn answered readily, for she was drawn to this friend of Miss Bump. "Father believed in cold climates and hard work while one is young. Luxuries come easily enough afterward, he said. Then I went about with him on vacations and when I'd left school. He was exploring and collecting primitive traditions, and we were very much alone. I had no girl friends. I

have moved about too much and I have worked so hard on my music this year that I did not have time for friendships. If one practices as much as one should, there is no time for anything else."

The Countess dipped her sweet biscuit in her tea and ate it with relish. "I knew you were not a fledgling, like that sweet child upstairs," she said, between bites. "You have learned how to forget yourself in an ambition,—the greatest lesson one can learn. That girl is a darling, but she looks on me as a superfluous old woman. Now play something for me. I need music to-day."

Roslyn did not hesitate. This was like old times, when her father had asked for music in just that way.

She rose, and went to the next room. She knew what she was going to play. "The *Fire Music* has been ringing in my head all day," she said, as she seated herself, and looked back at her new friend.

"Ah, and you have been a Brunhilde, shut away by the fires of necessity, no?" The smile was sympathetic, in spite of the light manner. "*Bien,* let us have the *Fire Music.* What sings in one's heart should be let loose on the world, even though it is only an echo of some great one's thoughts."

Roslyn ran her fingers over the keys. "I do not think of myself as a Brunhilde," she answered, slowly. "It was the first real music I played for my father when he came home from the South Seas. I was only twelve . . ." Her voice trailed off into a murmur and she began to play. At once Madame Valska, as she wished to be called, faded

from her mind like a dream and the music became the reality.

She played, hearing the leap and crackle of the magic fires and seeing the enchanted figure within their flaming circle: it was not she who made the fires leap and sparkle from the keys; the sound came from some far, enchanted land. When she had ended, her hands dropped without her volition, and she was hardly aware of the brief silence.

"You did that very nicely," said Miss Bump, who had come in with the others unnoticed. "Your teacher must have taken great pains with you. I do so adore Mendelssohn. Why, Valska, you haven't finished your tea yet!"

Countess Pavalska scraped the sugar out of the bottom of her teacup before she replied, smiling at Mrs. Chilton with unaffected friendliness. "If Mrs. Chilton and Miss Muriel will pardon my greediness, I believe I'll have another cup, *ma chère.* It's the best I've had for an age. Hotel tea is a tragedy."

That was all. Not a word about the Wagner music. Roslyn slipped from the piano bench and came back to the boudoir to join them around the tea-table while Madame Valska had her fourth cup of steaming tea. She felt that Madame did not like the way she had played the *Fire Music,* but it did not discourage her. She meant to find out just how Madame would interpret the theme. Her father's repeated precept,—"Don't be too shallow to learn from anyone who knows a thing better than you do . . . even if it's only wrapping up a bundle well . . ." had been drilled into her to good pur-

pose. If she could only get Madame to play the music.

Madame Pavalska laughed and shook her head. "Not to-day. I am resting all this week. I shall beg to be excused now," she said to the others, as she put down her cup and rose. "It is the hour for my nap."

Her graceful regrets took away any suggestion of rudeness and when she had left them, they were all enthusiastic about her. Roslyn was surprised at Mrs. Chilton's warmth. Muriel was the first to change the subject.

"You have such good little cakes, Miss Bump," she said, taking one from the muffin-stand, and nibbling it prettily. "They're a contrast to the refreshments at the Woman's Club. Did you ever see such enormous sandwiches? And the soup-plates of ice-cream. How can they eat so much?"

Miss Bump's long white hands expressed just the right shade of distaste. "My dear, they are barbarians," she murmured in her most affected manner. "Look at their figures. Not one of them weighs less than two hundred, I vow." She seemed to have forgotten the hearts and souls of these friends of hers.

"I liked the sandwiches," declared Roslyn. "I had been out for a walk and missed lunch, and they weren't too thick for me. Those funny little bricks they had at the Dramatic Club reception after the play weren't half so good as the soup-plates, either. Bob had three and Mr. Han and Dr. Briggs both ate two. I saw them."

"What an odd pair they are." Miss Bump was still willowy and mysterious. "How have they grown to be so inseparable? What strange power links them with its iron fetters?" She seemed to like this last phrase, for she repeated it as if memorizing it for her forthcoming book.

It reminded Roslyn of the mysterious telephone call of last Saturday when the authoress had been so mystifying about the Friday afternoon tea-drinking. She wished Miss Bump had explained what she meant by her secret message. On every occasion when they had met during the past week she had tried to speak privately to her but it almost seemed as if Miss Bump were evading her. "It can't be much of a mystery," she thought, comfortably. "Probably she was making up a plot for a thriller and forgot she was talking to me. I was all worked up over the necklace, too. Perhaps she wasn't so mysterious, after all."

Miss Bump seemed to understand what was going on inside her head, for she drew her aside, as they were leaving, to whisper in her ear:

"My plans were changed . . . at the last moment . . . do not speak of it . . . you shall come again . . . later. Go now and, *psst!* silence!"

Mrs. Chilton and Muriel on the doorstep would have heard the penetrating whisper if the roar of Bob's ancient chariot had not drowned all other sounds. He was tearing up the drive in a zigzag course, to a perfect cannonade of back-fire.

"It's gone crazy again!" cried Muriel in alarm.

"He'll kill himself yet!" They all ran out after her, Roslyn last.

"Great heavens," exclaimed Miss Bump, with clasped hands. "He comes like Jove, with lightnings about his head," and she added, quickly, "Mercy, he just missed that iron deer. That was a close shave."

Poor Bob was helpless again. The car had taken command and it played him the worst trick it had ever perpetrated. It rattled across the grass toward the little porch, and halted so suddenly that Bob flew out over the place where the wind-shield should have been, and he landed on the grass at Miss Bump's feet. Roslyn, as soon as she saw he was not hurt, thought, "Now she's got him. He'll simply have to talk to her."

"At last!" cried Miss Bump, as Bob got briskly to his feet. "I shall have the pleasure of getting acquainted with you! Come in and have some cakes and jam. Miss Roslyn, you will stop behind with him, will you not? Mrs. Chilton, I shall insist on being granted the pleasant task of settling his nerves with a cup of tea; weak tea, of course."

She managed it so that Bob was in the boudoir with a plate of cakes and chocolates beside his tea-cup and Roslyn dropping lumps of sugar in his hot tea before Mrs. Chilton and Muriel had crossed the lawn to the shrubbery path, and she finally melted his obstinate silence by her intelligent inquiries about clutches and steering gear. He began to talk after he had drunk the tea and by the time the chocolates had disappeared he was eloquent about

his gas-saver. Miss Bump listened respectfully, as became a seeker after truth. Roslyn marvelled at Bob's loquacity; she had not heard him talk so much in weeks.

He even invited the authoress to ride back in the car with him, after he had adjusted some of its inner parts, with her still admiring his skill with machinery. "She may buck a bit now and then but she's a pippin when she's feeling fit," he told her. "I'll be around again and take you a spin. She can eat up the dirt, I tell you. Fifty is nothing to her."

Roslyn left them and hurried back to the mansion. Dr. Briggs was coming to dinner and she wanted to get out some of her father's papers to show him. The Doctor, it had turned out, was a great student and he had other books beside biographies on his library shelves. He had asked to see the note-book she had spoken of when he and Mr. Han were arguing over the ancient myths of Ceylon. The book was in her trunk, with the other papers, and as she got it out she had a sudden impulse to look at her treasures.

The necklace was certainly beautiful, with its glowing, translucent gold and green and violet lights. She was glad that there was no connection between it and the coming of the Wong party to America. "I may never know who owned it but that doesn't matter so much to me now," she thought, as she put it back in its box. "After that scare about Hop Kee stealing it, I feel as if I didn't care who had it before; so long as I have it now.

I believe I'll wear it to the Ball. It will go finely with my yellow dress."

She took the pouch, together with the note-book, and went to the room downstairs, where she stowed the pouch in the bureau drawer, while she changed her dress. She meant to save her good clothes as much as possible, and she put on a pretty georgette that had seen better days. She could not resist trying the necklace on after she had dressed, and every time she looked at it, she loved it more. Yes, she certainly would wear it to the ball to-morrow night.

A noise of a closing door in Muriel's room startled her, and she snatched off the necklace and thrust it into its box before she knew what she was doing. It was a habit to hide it and, like all other habits, it persisted. She laughed at herself but, nevertheless, she put the necklace away without showing it to Muriel. "To-morrow night will be time enough," she thought. "It will be a surprise, something new . . ."

The bureau was in full view of the next room and so, still laughing at her own foolishness, she stowed the pouch in her travelling-bag in the closet and locked it safely. Then she went into Muriel's room, note-book tucked under her arm and ready for chat. Muriel had some news for her.

"I was making dessert just now," she said, taking off the pretty apron that covered her fine frock. "And Gladys told me she had found out who the Countess is. You'd never guess, from the way she looks. She's Pola Bori, the pianist. And she's got shoals of money."

Roslyn's heart stood still for a second. She had played for Pola Bori! Swift on the heels of that astonishing thought came the memory of the silence after the *Fire Music* had ended. Madame Pavalska had found nothing good to say of her performance, that was plain. Her cheeks burned as she recalled her own easy request for the celebrated pianist to play for them. Muriel, busy with arranging her dress, did not notice her silence.

"And Gladys says she has a castle in Poland near Cracov and a villa in Italy and a beautiful château in France," she went on. "I wish she would stay for the Ball. It would be wonderful to get better acquainted with her, particularly that we know now who she is."

Roslyn gave a little mirthless laugh. "She said she was here for a rest, and she'd hardly find the Ball interesting, after all the triumphs she has had in the great cities," she said, choking down her mortification as best she could. "And then, if she did stay, she'd have to be asked to open the Ball. I'd hate to have you miss that Grand March, Mew darling, for I know you're going to be a dream in that new frock. You're a much better partner for Mr. Wong than she would——"

"Don't!" cried Muriel, with unusual sharpness. "I've had enough of that from Father. If you're going to begin, too, I'll stop away from the Ball. I vow I will. I'll go to bed ill with something or other. I can't stand it."

She was actually trembling and there were tears in her big blue eyes. Roslyn flew to her side and

put both arms about her. "Dearest Mew, don't feel so bad about it," she implored. Here was her chance and she took it. "It's only for a week or two, anyway. Mr. Wong will be leaving soon. Perhaps his family will come over." She hardly knew what she was saying in her eagerness to give some hint of what she had overheard, without disclosing the whole truth. She felt Muriel stiffen and saw her cheek grow red, and she thought, "Now I've bungled it again. I'm such a goose."

Muriel, however, said no more on the subject. She suddenly relaxed, leaned to kiss Roslyn's cheek and then gently unwound the circling arms. "I must go down to see that the dessert is arranged on the plates," she said, in her normal tone. "It will be cooled by now, and Gladys is busy helping Mother."

She paused at the door to say in another tone, "Evelyn Harper just wrote me that she is going into business; imagine it, with all her fortune. She wants me to come over to help. It's a Style Shop and it would be such fun. If Father would only consent, but it's hopeless. I know how he'd act if I asked."

Roslyn went slowly downstairs to the music-room. She felt shut out somehow. Muriel had spoken to her as if she were almost a stranger. A clatter of feet behind her made her turn.

"Say, Rosie, I'm going over to hunt up that cave on Fortune Hill to-morrow morning. Want to come along?" Bob asked.

She halted at the center-table in the hall. "I've

got to work all the morning, Bobs," she replied, soberly. "I've been playing around too much this week. Wait till next week and I'll go with you. But Gladys says there are snakes up there, and I've been afraid of snakes ever since we had a king cobra in our verandah in Annam."

"Bosh, there aren't any snakes there," declared Bob, valiantly. "I'll wait till Monday if you're game for it. Old Aaron Lutz says there's a cave and a lake that hardly anybody sees nowadays. He used to go there when he was a boy. 'Folks is too weak-kneed, settin' in these here otty-*mo*biles,' he says, 'to use their legs, 'ceptin' trainin' fer races, runnin' around in their underwear, like loonies.' You ought to hear him, Rosie. I'll introduce you at the Ball. He's coming. Golly, I'd like to see you dancing with him. He's just about as pretty as Ling Loo. I bet he's ninety-nine, if he's a day."

"I'll dance with him," laughed Roslyn, herself again. "But I'm going to have a lot of dances with you. We get on so finely together, don't we?"

"Sure thing," responded Bob, heartily. "I'll keep you to that, miss. Every other dance, mind you. I'll snatch your program and fill it up the minute we get there, so you can't give me the go-by for those Jonesville swells. Old Aaron told me that the fellows over there had bought a lot of high-hats and white gloves; 'to look more like fools than they nacherly do.'"

Roslyn had a sudden mischievous prompting. "You'll have to save some dances for Miss Bump," she said. "She'd feel hurt if you neglected her."

"Sure," he returned easily. "I'm dated up for the second with her. She's a good sport, in spite of her funny looks. Gee, I hope Hop Kee forgets to shut Ling Loo in his cage. It'd be fun to see him skipping around and hear the girls squeal. Girls are such silly geese."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BALL

"I'm ready; are you?" called Muriel. "Do come see if I'm all right."

Roslyn halted for only a moment, and then went quickly to the other room. She had put on her necklace and it seemed to have clothed her in light. She felt that Muriel must cry out at the sight of her.

Muriel had her back to her but, as she swung about, Roslyn forgot her own grandeur in the vision that confronted her. "You're absolutely lovely, Mew," she exclaimed. "Those rhinestone fringes make you look as if you'd come straight from fairy-land. As your mother said, that dress is what they call a creation. You'll be the belle of the ball, for sure."

Muriel looked out from under frowning brows. "I don't know," she said uncertainly. "Perhaps there's too much sparkle about me,—slipper-buckles and all. I wish I'd chosen another color . . ."

"Silly!" cried Roslyn, fondly. "You're a perfect dream. The Jonesvillians, as Bob calls them, will be bowled over at first sight."

Muriel was unusually lovely. The soft dull green suited her fairness and the cold sparkle of the rhinestones gave a touch of moonbeams to the pale green cloud of her skirts. A small thread of diamonds, an heirloom from which Mrs. Chilton had refused to

be parted, lay like dew upon the warm whiteness of her neck. Never had she been so charming. But she could not see herself with Roslyn's eyes and her lips refused to smile at the heartfelt admiration poured out upon her.

"I don't know," she kept saying. "I feel as if the whole thing were going to be a flop, as Bob says. Hark, they're calling. We'll have to go down. Oh, dear!" She caught Roslyn's hand and drew her with her to the hall.

Roslyn gave her a push. "I've got to get my cloak, goose," she said. "Go along yourself," and she went laughing back for the wrap. Muriel would be more of a sensation if she went down alone, anyway.

Mr. Han came out of his room as she passed, and she gave a little cry at the gorgeous figure he made. He wore plum-colored brocade threaded with silver and gold, and he carried in his jewelled fingers a fan of ivory and parchment painted in rare design. He was transformed from the polite little old gentleman she had known into a splendid personage of imposing appearance.

He bowed many times in a courtly fashion, as she told him what a magnificent mandarin he looked, and he paid her compliments on her own appearance, as she hurried away to snatch the red cloak that had been her party wrap for so long.

She flung the wrap about her and took a hasty look in the glass. The black fur was not so sumptuous as it once had been but it was still warm and soft, and the red silk was as lustrous as it had been

when her father had bought it in the bazaar at Bangkok. She frowned at the combination of color. "Yellow and red and black; the necklace really doesn't go," she decided swiftly.

Muriel's voice came to her and she thought she heard Bob on the stair. She put the necklace in its box and shoved the box under some papers on the table. It would be safe there. Until she came back. She was too excited over the Ball, now that it was about to become a reality, to remember clearly what she was doing. Mr. Han was still in the hall. He, too, had forgotten something and he waved her downstairs with a gracious hand.

"I shall be but an imperceptible moment," he told her. "Do not allow my ignominious lack of memory to detain you. The motors which the august Burgess has sent for us are at the door."

She went and he stood quite still where he was until he heard her voice among the others in the hall below. Then he turned and went like a shadow to her door, opened it noiselessly and glided inside. When he came out, he made a swift visit to his own room, shaking his head as if he had been deeply pained. "Poor child," he murmured, "she has been tempted beyond her strength. She thought I did not see . . ."

Down in the hall Roslyn was looking about her in unaffected surprise. Everyone was there and each in their own way were almost as greatly transformed as Mr. Han. Mrs. Chilton in her coral sequins was radiant; Mr. Wong's immaculate evening dress gave him a tremendous air of distinction; Mr. Chilton,

with the button of the Legion of Honor that had belonged to his Uncle Henry in his buttonhole and a gold chain across his shirtfront, looked dignity itself; even Bob seemed inches taller and his fair hair shone like a close golden cap that bore no resemblance to his unruly everyday top-knot.

"How beautiful you all look!" she cried gaily. "I'd hardly known you, Mrs. Chilton. You look like ——"

"That's a compliment," laughed Mrs. Chilton.

Bob nudged her. "We'll go together," he said, under his breath. "I'm getting cold feet already. Don't you dare lose me, Rosie, or I'll cut for home and stay there."

Mr. Han came out as they were getting into the machines. He seemed a little preoccupied as he sat there on the back seat with Mrs. Chilton and the Honorable James. Perhaps he was wondering if Hop Kee would serve the tea for these American barbarians with proper style. Roslyn imagined he looked at her rather sadly as he helped her out of the car but she soon forgot such fancies in the delightful excitement of the Ball.

In the cloak-room she found confusion. It was packed with girls and women from all parts of the countryside, each determined to get to one of the four mirrors that the management had lavishly provided. She got no farther than barely inside the door when she was forced to retreat in order to save herself. She hailed Muriel and Mrs. Chilton as they came up, and told them of the state of affairs. The three of them found a small closet under the stairs

that made a good hiding-place for their wraps, and they passed into the large bare hallway where their escorts awaited them.

Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Binns had joined the party and they ushered them with much ceremony into the ballroom. The band struck up an air from the Mikado, and there was a rustle all about the hall. Bob pulled at Roslyn's arm to whisper, "Do you hear that music? That'll get Mew's goat. I wonder if it was the Governor or His Lordship who put them up to it."

Roslyn choked down a sudden gurgling noise in her throat, for the tune that was being blared out by the red-faced brasses and horns was "He's going to marry Yum-yum" and she knew Muriel would recognize it.

Muriel gave no sign, however, as she took Mr. Wong's arm for the Grand March that was to open the Ball. Wong, in his formal elegance, was a good foil to her sparkle and sheen, and all eyes were turned to them as they walked out on the floor. Roslyn heard many admiring comments, which she put away for Muriel's comfort later on. Mr. Hopkins, who had mounted the platform where the band was enthroned, shouted for order. The band stopped playing and the chatter died down.

"Fellow citizens," Mr. Hopkins began, in a flattering silence. "This is a great occasion . . ." and he went on for fifteen minutes, boasting of Belleview's past and present, prophesying her glorious future, until Roslyn thought the Honorable James was on the brink of a remonstrance. Mr.

Hopkins ended in time to escape this, however, and the band played, "Defer, defer-r, to the Lord High Executioner," as a tribute to Mr. Wong's importance,—that the scene of the Mikado was laid in Japan instead of China made no difference to the band,—and the procession started.

Bob's arm clamped down on Roslyn's hand as they made the round of the hall behind the others. "Moon-face and her little ma are here," he said in her ear. "Look over there in the corner. It's a regular sun-burst."

Roslyn followed the direction of his eyes and saw a mound of pink satin and pinker flesh beside Gladys' beaded cerulean crêpe. A couple of sturdy young farmers were trying to interest Gladys but she appeared to be oblivious of their efforts. Her face was turned to the head of the line and, as she waited for the procession to pass to allow her to take her own place there with one of the young farmers, she leaned forward to bow and wave a plump hand to the approaching couple. She had eyes for nothing else.

"The nerve of her," grumbled Bob. "She's nuts on His Lordship, I tell you. Who's that?" he demanded abruptly, as a girl, followed by her stout father and stouter mother, came into the hall. "Some good-looker, I should say. Don't you know who she is?"

Roslyn had not seen her, and the group was lost in the crowd before she could locate them. When the procession had twice circled the hall and the band burst into a lively two-step, she said, "There's Miss

Bump, Bob, over by the big stand of ferns. She'll be expecting you for the second dance, I suppose."

Bob glanced at the authoress who was surrounded by a circle of admiring natives. "I'll find her, I guess," he remarked indifferently. "Golly, she looks queer in that Greek toga-thing she's got on. Sappho wasn't in it with her."

The dance was brief. Roslyn had a glimpse of Muriel floating past with Mr. Wong and she thought both of their faces looked too grave for a ballroom. She thought, "Poor Mew's thinking of what people may be saying about her and he,—he must be wondering when his wife will get here."

She had no chance to ponder on Muriel's tangled affairs for, as soon as the two-step was ended, she was surrounded by a number of young men who were eager to secure her for the next dance. Most of them were local crack-shots who wanted first-hand information on big game in Africa and elsewhere; the rest were attracted to her because of her being one of the family who were entertaining the Chinese party. They came to get news of Wong and his friends but they stayed to talk and dance. She was a good talker on subjects that were familiar to her and she danced extremely well; so that as the evening advanced she had to split dances and even quarter them. Old Aaron was one of her favorite partners. She sat out two dances with the old man—and enjoyed his simple yet acute criticisms of life and people.

She forgot Bob until she became aware of him as the constant partner of a small, rounded, beguiling

creature with big brown eyes and dark waving hair who hung on his arm and gazed up at him as if he were the paragon of the world. "Who is the girl over there?" she asked young Hopkins, who was struggling through the third waltz with her.

"Her with the ankle-straps?" he asked, treading neatly on Roslyn's toe. "That's Verna Puff. Her old man has the sausage factory. She's a great little Verna. Has more frat pins than any girl in the county. She's going to be a whale like her mother, though, when she's—pardon *me*, Miss Blake, your feet seem to be always just where I don't expect them to be. Say, let's sit out the rest of the dance. I'd rather talk about things."

He led her to a corner where a tall palm screened the angle and shut them away somewhat from the rest of the assembly. She could see, through the palm leaves, her partner for the next dance scrutinizing each couple that circled past him in an effort to find her among the dancers. A whim prompted her to hide herself here and be an onlooker for the brief space of the dance. So when the music ceased she sent young Hopkins off to his partner and she sat back, smiling to herself.

The brick walls of the Armory were draped with flags of all nations and there were a few palms and a great mass of rubber-plants,—these last loaned by the ladies of Belleview village,—and, with the lights and the colors of the women's dresses, the scene was gay and almost brilliant. Glittering ornaments and spangled robes were the fashion and every woman in the country had done her best to cut a fine figure.

Roslyn thought, "It's awfully nice, after all. Jonesville will have to acknowledge that the village is——"

"Ah, Miss Blake, alone? A penny for your thoughts," said Dr. Briggs, as he came into the bower. "I thought I'd take a rest here but I'm delighted to have a chance to speak to you of something that has been on my mind."

She thought, "Is it possible that he knows of Mr. Wong's wife?" Aloud she said, "I'm sure I'll be glad to have a talk," and she moved to make room for him on the rustic settee. "I've run away for a while, myself. It's pleasant in here, isn't it?"

There was a rustle of silks and the kindly yellow face of Mr. Han appeared. He had followed the Doctor, and had caught her last words. "Pleasant, indeed," he repeated. "Ah, yes. As the second Valli of the *Upanishad* of the Brahman says, 'The good is one thing, the pleasant is another. It is well for him who clings to the good; he who chooses the pleasant, misses his end.' May I be seated? Or do I intrude?" Roslyn thought he looked at her oddly, almost reproachfully.

"Not at all. Not at all," Dr. Briggs assured him with warmth. "In fact, you will support me in my request, for it was you who suggested it to me. Miss Blake, have you ever thought of having your father's biography written?"

Roslyn shook her head. "I have wished that there might be some memorial to him," she replied seriously. "I did not know exactly what sort, though. A biography would be——"

"The best memorial," interposed the Doctor, growing more excited. "I tell you that is the best monument a man can have. And there are plenty of note-books and diaries, you told me the other day. Would you trust me with the task? Me and our friend here, I mean, for to him will fall the job of putting me right where I fall into error; as I shall, as I shall. Man is born to make mistakes, you know."

Roslyn saw Fred Binns heading toward the palm-corner, and she responded hastily and warmly, "Indeed I'd love it of all things. Shall you want all the papers? There are a good many."

"If I may come over some day next week and go over them with you," he suggested, beaming. "You can tell me which are the most important. It will be a partnership, you see. A labor of love . . ."

Fred Binns bowed and extended a crooked arm. His white kid gloves were still spotless, and his manner was faultless. He was one of the twenty-four purchasers of silk hats from the Jonesville store, though he had managed to spread the rumor that his high hat had come straight from Stetson's. Roslyn did not want him to get any hint of the proposed biography, for she had heard that, in spite of his exalted manner, he was an eager gossip, and she hurried him away. Fred was vastly pleased with her eagerness to dance with him. He bragged about it afterward.

Mrs. Chilton, in her corals and with her charm of manner, was an instant favorite; before the ball was half over she had won the hearts of all she met.

But it was not so with the Honorable James. His behavior speedily got the Master of Ceremonies into hot water, for he insisted on dancing in his stiff, old-fashioned way, with only Jonesville ladies, and, in spite of poor Egbert Schimmel's best efforts, he would not be persuaded to honor any Belleview matron or maid with his society. At last, he had been heard to comment caustically on the refreshments as good enough for rustics but decidedly inferior to a cultivated taste. Roslyn was ashamed of the arrogance and ill temper he displayed as he realized that he had not made the grand effect he had intended by his lofty superior manners.

When the intermission came and refreshments were served, she found herself next to Miss Bump, who was in a sentimental mood and talked a great deal too much for the enjoyment of Roslyn's partner. She waved a graceful hand toward the distant corner of the hall where, by the entrance door, a curtain hung.

"I understood that there was to be a tea-table over there but it seems to be a mistake," she began and interrupted herself. "Ah, yes, the curtain is being drawn. An Oriental touch. Very attractive. Mr. Wong's man makes excellent tea, I believe. I wonder if you would be so good as to get me a cup, Mr. Homeyer? I am famished for stimulating drink."

The sturdy Pennsylvania German rose stiffly. He thought it beneath a man's dignity to be sent for tea, but he could not refuse. As soon as he was out of ear-shot, Miss Bump leaned close to Roslyn. Her

negligent wave of the hand directed Roslyn's attention to a couple across the room.

"Aren't they too precious?" she murmured, fondly. "He came to claim the second dance. I was talking with her. It was a case of love at first sight. Of course, I resigned in favor of her. Young love, you know . . . and the budding blossoms of life's spring-time . . ."

Roslyn suppressed a chuckle. "It's Bob's first real case," she remarked impartially. "He'll have it hard, before he gets over it. He's always kept away from girls."

Miss Bump looked reproachful. "I see you are a materialist," she sighed. "Yes, that is the modern spirit. The soul, the heart, eternal devotion, have gone out of fashion. Hush, they are looking across at us. We must not brush the bloom from the shy dreams of young love.—Oh, how do you do, Mr. Wong? I must tell you what a lovely picture you and Miss Muriel made at the head of the line. You were perfect together."

Mr. Wong bowed and thanked her in a subdued way, as if her words were not without a sting. Roslyn thought of his voice when he had said he would send for his wife. It had contained a note of real longing. "He is splendid," she told herself. "If Miss Bump only knew, what a novel she could write of real grown-up devotion."

When it came her turn for the second dance with Mr. Wong,—he was impartial and danced with all alike,—she thought she detected the same sad note in his voice as Muriel passed them in the dance.

"Miss Muriel is beautiful to-night," he murmured, his eyes following the other couple. "She has too many partners. She had to cancel our last two dances. . . ."

Roslyn thought, "That's good. I won't have to mix in, after all. She's lost interest in him, now that the other young men are rushing her." And she smiled up at him without reserve. "Dr. Briggs says that Mr. Han is going to help him with some writing," she said. "And that means he'll stay a long time. I'm so glad."

A couple bumped into them and cut her short, and when they were going smoothly again she saw that Mr. Wong's attention had been drawn in another direction. A girl in flaming red, with sparkling heels to her red velvet slippers and a huge red ostrich-feather fan had tapped his shoulder with her fan as they passed her.

"Don't forget the next wriggle's mine, old dear," she cried with a flashing smile and a droop of her heavily beaded eyelashes.

He bent his head slightly. To Roslyn he explained rather stiffly, "The young lady is trying to spoof me. I don't know her at all. She held me up a bit ago and put her initials on my card. A joke, I fancy. She's rather odd, you know. I shan't carry on, of course."

He was sincere enough, yet Roslyn saw him dancing with the flame-colored beauty more than once in the next hour and when the last dance began she was surprised to note the red frock and his black coat the first on the floor.

Mr. Chilton was at his worst as he gathered his party together while the strains of "Home, Sweet Home," were floating on the air. He appeared to be thoroughly disgusted with Belleview festivities, and hurried them off with scant ceremony. It was well that their wraps were easily gotten, for he had come to the end of his patience when they hastened back to him at the door of the men's coat-room.

"We will not wait for Robert and Mr. Wong," he snapped. "They will use Mr. Wong's car. Hop Kee also is engaged for a time. Now, Mr. Han, if you are ready . . ." and he fairly pushed the little gentleman into Burgess Beerbower's luxurious car.

Roslyn followed Muriel to the tower room. There had been no pleasant loitering below stairs to talk the Ball over together; Mr. Chilton had seen to that. But, however he might try to dampen their spirits while he had them under his eye, he could not follow them to their rooms to check the flow of talk.

Roslyn closed the door behind her with a little laugh. Her blood was pounding through her veins in joyous rhythm, and she felt as if she would never want to sleep.

"Didn't we have a gorgeous time!" she exclaimed. "And everybody was talking about you, Mew. You made a great hit with them all. Young Binns raved about you all the time. Did you see Bob's 'budding blossom of life's young spring-time,' as Miss Bump called her? She's pretty and she knows it, the little wretch. I saw her making eyes at four different boys in the palm-bower while Bob

was doing his duty with Miss Hopkins and that poor plain Homeyer girl."

Muriel laughed and joked gaily; indeed she was extravagant in her praise of the Ball. If Roslyn had not been so full of her own recital of the evening's incidents, she must have noticed her agitation. When she left her an hour later Muriel was still chattering about the invitations she had received for motor-trips and movies. Roslyn had to shut her door upon her twitterings.

"She's had a splendid time," she thought, as she began to take off her gold head-band, "and so have I. It certainly was a fine party, no matter what the *Jonesville Spirit* will say about it."

Then she remembered she had left the box under the papers on the table but she did not look for it at once. She knew it was safe there. Even when she did look and could not find it, she was not distressed. It would be somewhere around the house, for Ling Loo had not been out of doors after dinner and had been shut in his wicker cage before Gladys and Hop Kee, now more friendly, had started for the Armory. She could not venture out to hunt for it to-night under Mr. Chilton's very nose.

"It will be under the carpet, perhaps," she thought as she slipped into bed. The music of the Belleview Band was thumping in her ears and she smiled to herself as she curled up between the sheets. Bob's sudden infatuation, the girl in red, and Dr. Briggs danced together in a drowzy haze. . . .

When she wakened, the sun was shining over her bed and the breakfast gong was chiming far below.

The sound came up faint and dim yet inexorable. Muriel's door was closed and she made as little noise as possible. She raced through her dressing, for she knew the Honorable James would be more impatient than usual this morning. No time to hunt for the box before breakfast; she would have to explain her delay.

There was no lump under the edge of the carpet, either by Muriel's door or in any other part of the long hallway. She saw that in one hasty glance as she shut her door. The South Suite was unusually quiet but that was natural enough, after the late hours they had kept last night: even after Mr. Wong had returned Roslyn had heard subdued sounds of talk and of someone moving about in the rooms across the hall. "They must have had a lot to talk about to keep them up till dawn," she thought. "I wonder if that girl in red —— Oh, Ling Loo, you're out again, are you?"

The little monkey had dropped from the upper railing of the stair and clung to her shoulder with his black fingers clutching her dress. He looked into her eyes with his old, wise, withered face close to hers and there was such a pathetic expression on the tiny countenance that she involuntarily drew him closer, patting his back and murmuring some endearing words.

He seemed to understand her feeling, for he nestled down, with one arm about her neck, and she went into the dining-room carrying him in that fashion. The moment he saw Mr. Chilton in the big arm-chair at the foot of the table, however, he

skipped nimbly away to him and ran up the back of the chair to perch on the top, just behind the head of the Honorable James, where he sat twitching his eyebrows and drawing down the corners of his long upper lip in imitation of that august personage.

Bob had a hard time to control himself; it seemed that the gaiety of the party or the exhilaration of first love had made him somewhat light-minded. He tried to cover his unfilial grin by a boisterous greeting.

"Well, well, Rosie, you're here at last. Mother was just going to send up for you. We'll have to get a time-clock for you girls to punch every morning, I guess."

Gladys snickered and his mother glanced at him in some surprise, for he was generally very quiet when his father was present. "Muriel isn't coming down," she said, gently. "Poor child, she has a bad headache and I insisted that she keep in bed for a while."

"She danced too much." Bob was not to be suppressed. "She didn't miss one. I'm pretty tough and I had to sit out half a dozen. It takes us men to stand the gaff, though. Mr. Han was up and off on the seven o'clock train. He didn't have to make up his beauty sleep."

There was a faint murmur of surprise at the early morning energy of elderly Mr. Han, which moved Gladys to offer her share of news.

"He made it up with Tim Coogan last night at the Ball. He said he had word sudden-like that he

had to get to town on the seven and he offered Tim twict the fare. Tim ain't any early bird himself ——"

A glance from under the cold grey brows of the head of the house cut her cheerful recital short and she vanished into the pantry, where Hop Kee was waiting her with his tray. Roslyn heard the Chinaman make the low whistling sound that he used to summon Ling Loo, and the monkey at once deserted his post on the chair-back to scamper to his master. Mr. Chilton looked after him with a twisted smile.

"He is very fond of me," he announced harshly. "Very. *I* never have to resort to persuasion or commands to bring him to me. I have a magnetic power over animals, I believe. I once had a dog ——" and he launched on a story he was in the habit of telling about once a week but to which they all must listen with eager attention.

Roslyn knew it by heart; she knew when to smile and when to look sad, so she did not have to use more than one little section of her mind for it: with another part of her brain, she thought, "I'm sorry Mr. Han has gone, he would have helped me hunt for my box. Hop Kee is nicer than he was at first, but I can't get used to him. I feel as if he disliked me. Both Muriel and Mrs. Chilton feel that way, too. But there's no help for it, I'll have to ask him if I can't find it myself."

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER THE BALL

ROSLYN did not find her box that day; nor did she ask Hop Kee to help her in her search, for immediately after breakfast Mr. Wong, Hop Kee and the wicker cage with Ling Loo in it drove off down the circling driveway. Mrs. Chilton told her they would be away for two or three days.

"Mr. Han is talking of going back to China some time soon," she said, as she sank into the chair by the window. She still held the small tray on which she had brought Muriel's glass of milk. "He sat out a number of dances with me last night, and I was quite charmed with him. At home here I am so occupied with the household that I had no chance to really know him."

"Is Hop Kee going with him?"

"Of course, that is, I should imagine so," replied the other, glancing out across the lawn. "But he may not. No, he certainly will not. He is Mr. Wong's valet. Yet I got the impression,—I don't know how,—that Hop Kee was going with Mr. Han. How lovely the trees look this year. We ought to have frost, though, to make a brilliant autumn. What a nice woman Miss Bump is," she added bending forward to watch the authoress, who could be seen through the thinning trees, emerge from her porch. "She has a heart of gold. Gladys tells me

that she has sent poor Mrs. Dodd,—whose husband died last week,—all the way out to California to be caretaker for her bungalow there. She's coming this way, and I have to stuff the chicken before Gladys goes to church. Won't you run down to see her? She's on her way to service, so she won't stop long."

Roslyn gave her bed-cover a final smooth and hurried down to the front porch. If Miss Bump were only going to stop a moment she might as well meet her half-way. The authoress was not at all the worse for the Ball. Indeed, she looked fresher than usual, and she had her air of mystery very strong about her.

"A happy chance, my dear Miss Blake," she murmured, almost in Roslyn's ear. "I longed for a private interview, and behold! it is arranged for us. Some call it Chance. Some call it Fate. I prefer to attribute it to my guardian angel. Keep the Wednesday after next for me." She put her finger on her lip. "Silence and secrecy. There will be no mischance this time. I was balked by the arrival of the Countess. I did not expect her. I expected another."

"Wednesday week," Roslyn repeated mechanically. She did not know what else to say.

"You will play for me, remember," continued Miss Bump, in her more practical tone. "The *Fantasia Impromptu,* if you please. It is a favorite of mine." Then she lapsed into the other manner. "You will not be left to strangers, I assure you. Play for me, for me alone. Ravish my soul with melody. Adieu."

She was gone so swiftly that Roslyn had to run after her to put her question. "But what shall I tell Mrs. Chilton? She saw you coming and sent me down."

Miss Bump halted. "Ah, yes. To be sure. Now I recall that I wanted to ask her to accompany me to the movies in Jonesville to-morrow afternoon,—school children's matinée,—where they are showing an old play which Abe Rothstein,—a magnificent genius, by the way,—and I, wrote long, oh, so long ago." She added candidly, "I really did want to ask her. I forgot it last night . . . ask her to 'phone me. . . ."

She was off again in earnest this time, leaving Roslyn half-laughing, half-perplexed. Wednesday week. It was a long time ahead; so much to do before that day. Her thoughts ran about like mice, nibbling now here, now there, at the cake of life. She had to get the operetta done, or almost done by that time. She must practice the *Fantasia*. Muriel was not going to be ill, thank goodness. The snuff-bottle was still in the pouch and it was more valuable than the necklace. After all, it was a good thing the necklace and not the snuff-bottle had been lost,—temporarily. When would Hop Kee be back?

She gave herself a little shake. "I'll tell Mrs. Chilton about the movie and then I'll begin to hunt for the necklace. I have a clear field, anyway. If it's in the house, I'll find it,—in time."

She searched at intervals all that day and the next. Not to be observed, she chose the times when the others were occupied or absent, and so the

search was lengthened out considerably. She went through the fourth floor first as she was unmolested up there. When Mr. Chilton carried off his wife and Bob to evening-song at the village church, she excused herself and stayed at home to poke about the lower hall and pantry. She had to give it up.

"There isn't a spot he could have stuffed it in," she told herself ruefully. "The box is small and flat but it isn't like a soft paper thing that could be stuffed into a crack. I simply won't give up, though. I'll have it by the time Bob is ready to take the trip to town."

Bob had postponed the Monday excursion. He had to repair the car.

"Can't have her cutting up any didoes this time," he had said as he broke the news. "I've got to go over the carburetor again and tighten the clutch and oh, a lot of other things. Mr. Wong paid me for his gas-saver and I'm going to put in some new parts and I'll have to work like a horse to have her in shape by Thursday, or Friday. No accidents this trip."

"That's sweet of you, Bobby, to be so careful of my bones," she laughed. "I'm not afraid, though. I can jump——"

He laughed. "You'll be on the back seat, so you'll have plenty of chance. Verna can't ride anywhere but on the front seat. It makes her giddy, she says. She's a wonderful girl. And what she don't know about the stage! She's going to let me take her to a show at the Aldine. She told me all about it . . ."

Roslyn did not wait to hear the full list of Verna Puff's perfections or she might have spent another hour with him. She went instead to find her guardian. Her funds were low, too low to afford the visit to town if she had to pay her car-fare. She had managed to stretch her allowance over two long months but she now needed money badly, and she would not break in on the small sum she had been putting away for the future.

She found him in the ornate sitting-room of his private suite. He was reading a steamship folder and was so absorbed that he did not know she was on the threshold until she spoke.

"Yes, you may come in," he said, grudgingly. "I am rather busy, though. In ten minutes we must start for service. Is Robert ready?"

She told him Bob was waiting in the reception hall. Then she made her request in the most acceptable words she could find.

He drew a whistling breath through his long nose and bent his eyes on the folder. She saw that it had a picture of the Pacific palm groves on its front page but she was not interested in it. She wanted to hear what he was preparing to say.

"Your suggestion comes at the wrong time, my dear ward," he said, smoothly. "Your funds are depleted. Investments. For the future. I can give you no money at present. Unless," he added, with a sardonic light in his pale eyes, "you desire me to furnish your extravagances out of my own purse? I have known such cases."

"But, Mr. Chilton, how can I get along without

money?" she asked, stung by his mocking air. "Why didn't you tell me that I was to have no more?"

He held up his hand, and the expression of his long hard face was not pleasant. "You have food and shelter, I believe? And you remarked in my presence recently that you would spend nothing more on clothing this year. Your work requires little beside patience on your part, and some pens, ink and paper, as the exercises say. What is your grievance?"

She was silent before his harsh tone. If she spoke, she would make matters worse. She thought quickly. There were still some long weeks before Mr. Laird would return. She must sell the snuff-bottle at once. She did not reply to his sarcastic question but bent her head and turned to go. He halted her with a sort of dignified snarl.

"Let this be between ourselves. If matters turn out as I expect, you will have no cause to complain. Meanwhile, no chatter."

Chatter. The word was odious to her, for she did not deserve it. She clenched her fists in her sweater pockets and said not a word. Thanks to her training she was able to remain silent under injustice. Her heart beat faster and her cheeks burned but she managed to keep her heart clean of rancor, hard as it was to do so. After all, her father had appointed him to his post of power over her and she must try to obey; until she was released. It could not last forever. She would be of age in three years.

She threw herself into the work of writing the

operetta with renewed energy, and she practised every minute she could. The passionate hunger that she felt for her father's comforting presence drove her more and more as the days passed. Mr. Wong was out a great deal, and neither Mr. Han nor Hop Kee returned until the end of the week: Bob was spending his time between his invalid car and the fascinating Verna; Muriel was rushing from one engagement to another and was too tired between times to do anything but rest; Mr. Chilton had gone off on his mysterious business; Mrs. Chilton and Gladys were deep in transplanting phlox, trimming shrubs, setting out and taking in bulbs and all manner of outdoor and indoor work peculiar to the fall of the year. So she was left free to follow her bent and she soon found that she had reached the point where she must have advice and help.

"I'll have to see Capponi and sell the snuff-bottle, too," she said as she arranged the sheets of the operetta in a neat pile. "If Bob doesn't go tomorrow, I'll have to borrow from Muriel and go alone. Nearly half the month is gone and the Competition will close before I have *Ali Baba* half done. I've wasted time looking for the necklace."

She did not have to borrow money from Muriel, for Bob announced at dinner that night that the car was ready and if Roslyn wanted to go, she'd have to be on hand at seven. "Verna likes to ride in the early morning," he explained proudly. "She's a regular morning-glory, I tell her. She says she wants to get a permanent wave before we go to the theater, so that I won't be ashamed of her. That's

how little she thinks of her looks. And generous! She made her father give her a lot of lunch tickets, so I wouldn't have to spend so much. . . ."

His mother listened with an odd little smile at the corners of her lips. She did not take Bob's affair seriously, for she knew that, like measles or whooping cough, it was bound to attack him sooner or later. All she said was, "Roslyn says she will have some business that may keep her late. Be sure to bring her back with you."

"Sure," he replied easily. "Verna likes her a lot. She says Rosie's her ideal of a top-notch woman spy; good-looker, mysterious, dark, and all that."

"Mercy!" cried Roslyn. "That girl is as bad as Gladys. The movies have turned her head. I'm almost afraid to go with you, after all, Bobsy."

She ran upstairs laughing at the absurdity of the callow young things and as she heard Mr. Wong's door open, she slipped into the front hall to avoid meeting him in his bathrobe. He was going to the bathroom of the South Suite, three doors beyond his own. When he had passed she went on her way, with an involuntary backward glance along the hall. The other doors of the suite were closed but a sudden puff of wind stirred the curtain in Mr. Wong's doorway and the door itself creaked slowly open. She stopped, petrified.

The room was in the usual evening disorder of the average young man, clothes on chairs, books and papers on the floor; but she saw nothing beyond the pile of magazines on the center table, for under those magazines she saw her carved box with the

red clasp like a flower. Ling Loo must have hid it there last Saturday night and it had lain unseen till now. Mr. Wong evidently had not disturbed the magazines.

She tiptoed in and picked it up and flew upstairs, all in a glow of happiness. With the box in her hands she felt she had a talisman against ill-fortune. She must never lose it again.

"That's the second time he's stolen it, the wretch," she thought. "There sha'n't be a third time. I'll take it with me to-morrow and perhaps I'll sell it. I really might lose it if Ling Loo stays much longer."

She put it again in the bag in the closet and as she bent to lock the bag, she saw a bit of paper in the crack where the German exercise had been. She was not interested in exercises but something prompted her to see what the paper was. It came out with ease, for it was thin, tough paper. She was surprised to find that it was a sealed envelope of legal size, addressed in a laborious hand. She took it over to the light to read the name.

"Mrs. W. Wong!" she exclaimed with a gasp of surprise. "Why, it's for Mr. Wong's wife. Who could have written it? Mr. Han, I suppose, for there's no one else who would write to her from this house."

The address was of a town in the Sun-Ping province in Hunan. Evidently it had been intended for the post, for there were stamps on it; uncancelled stamps. It was not a privately sent letter to Mrs. Wong. Why was it here in the closet crack?

"That Ling Loo," she murmured. "He's been at his tricks, stealing and hiding things away. That's it. He's poked this into the cubby-hole in the attic and it's dropped down into my closet, like the exercise did. I wonder what I ought to do about it?"

The first thing she did was to dust it carefully, for it was covered with fine dust as if it had lain in the closet for a long time. The cubby-hole must be filled with dust, she thought, to cover it so completely. She sat looking at it and wondering what she ought to do with it. Should she mail it to Mrs. Wong? She decided finally to give it to Mr. Wong when he returned.

"Since I know that he has a wife, I'd rather he knew that I knew," she thought. "Perhaps I shall tell him that none of the others do. He has forgotten, I guess, to speak about her. Or he may think we all know . . ."

She had no chance that night, for Mr. Wong was gone when she came down later, and in the morning he was not yet up when Bob summoned her to the drive where the rejuvenated car stood. Then for twenty-four hours she forgot about the letter in the more absorbing interests of the day in town.

When she parted from Bob and the fair Verna, Bob drew her aside to thrust a five-dollar note into her hand. "For the music," he whispered. "We needn't say anything about it to Verna, though." And then quite loudly he remarked, "Well, that's all right. Wanamaker's at four will suit me. We'll be there on the dot."

She found Mr. Capponi chained to his chair with

rheumatism. He was delighted to see her, approved of her libretto for *Ali Baba,* praised the first little song, corrected the faults of the second one, and then, as his pain came on again, he sent her to the man of whom he had spoken; the composer who would criticize and help her with the arrangement of her themes. Señor Caldes was under obligation to Capponi and would give his services without charge.

"He will receive you at eleven," Capponi told her after he had used the telephone that stood on his table beside the chair. "You must be prompt, for he has a temper. If roused, he will not like your music. *Addios.* Good luck and remember, never say 'It is impossible.' Say always, *always* 'I will.'" And he had added kindly, wincing at the pain, "Let me know how you progress, my child. That small song shows promise of better things to come. I am much encouraged."

There was more than an hour before her appointment and the University was on her way to Señor Caldes' house in Baltimore Avenue. She would have time to show her treasures and get the verdict. That would give her more leisure later in the afternoon, when she must try to dispose of the snuff-bottle.

The office of Dr. Smithers, the authority on Chinese art at the University, was being painted and the eminent professor of Oriental art had to receive her in his secretary's small ante-room. Upon the request for a private interview he sent Miss Haven out on some errand and then turned to Roslyn, who was still standing by the desk with her bag. As she

sat down she decided not to reveal her name nor that of her father.

She told him she had two articles she wanted to have valued, if he would be so good. They had been given her, she said, by someone who had traveled much in the East. He nodded and held out his hand for the red cotton roll that held the snuff-bottle. He was plainly a man of few words.

"Ah, this is fine," he said, examining the small jar with interest. "This is a fine specimen. The crack is too minute to mar it. Pure turquoise. Of the Yung Chen period, you say? Yes, that was the height of fashion for snuff-bottles. It is of considerable value. Any private collection or any museum might be glad to have it. There is an inscription; have you read it?"

She had to confess she had not even seen it. He pointed it out, a tiny hieroglyph on the bottom. He went to another room, returned in a short time with the information that the inscription read, "To the admirable Son of Heaven, the Lord of Sun-Ping." He wrote down the address of a private dealer for her.

"I wish we had the funds, but we go in for Babylonian stuff at present," he said, and rose as if the matter were ended.

He stared a bit oddly at her when she brought out the carved box and opened it. She was surprised that he appeared to be rather staggered by the necklace. He examined it as if it were some amazing discovery instead of a rare piece of carved jade of the eighteenth century. He kept muttering, "Yes,

yes, violet and green and gold, quite unusual," and "Typical Yung Chen, I see."

His manner made her uneasy and she wanted to get away to her appointment with Señor Caldes, so she made a move as if to rise. "I shall not sell the necklace," she told him. "I just wanted to know if it was valuable. Someone told me that it was an imitation."

He fairly glared at her, as he dropped the microscope from his eye. "Anyone who told you that doesn't know jade," he snapped. "This is the real thing. You have a fortune there, young woman. Such jade ought to be in a museum. It's a sin to keep it in private hands."

She managed to recover her treasures and thank him sufficiently for his kindness and leave before the clock in the tower near by boomed the hour. She was somewhat flustered by his manner of looking at her and did not feel comfortable until she was again in the street with the crisp October wind blowing against her hot cheeks.

In the temporary office, Dr. Smithers sat at Miss Haven's desk and he shook his head as he muttered, "Strange . . . that necklace . . . twice in one week . . . the old Chinaman must have sent her, hoping for a bid. I wish I weren't bound to secrecy . . . I wasn't sure at first, but on second sight . . . it's the finest bit of jade I've seen . . ."

Meanwhile Roslyn was hurrying to reach Señor Caldes and her mind was once more in a turmoil of uncertainty. The jade necklace seemed fated to

upset her plans. If it were so valuable, she was almost afraid to keep it in her possession. She ought to dispose of it, see that it was safely placed in some collection or museum, as Dr. Smithers had suggested. Yet her father had said explicitly, with his last breath, that the necklace was an imitation, and he had known all about it. Jade was easily imitated, she knew. On the other hand, Dr. Smithers was an expert.

When she rang the bell at Señor Caldes' modest home, she had to put the problem out of her mind and for the next two hours, she needed all of her wits for the task that the dark-skinned Señor mapped out for her. The first chorus was written for the four stringed instruments before she left the house on Baltimore Avenue and she had a bundle of scribbled sheets to carry away with her. The operetta did not seem such a tremendous undertaking, with an expert beside her to guide and suggest.

"I'll go right on with it the moment I get home," she thought, as she took the trolley. "I wish I didn't have to go see the dealer this afternoon. I'd rather go into the Library and work over this stuff till it is time to meet Bobs. But I've got to go, because I said I would."

The idea struck her as the car swung eastward that she might take the snuff-bottle and necklace into Rosenbach's to have them valued. Since she was going to sell the snuff-bottle and possibly the necklace too she might as well have a clear idea of what they were worth. Dr. Smithers had not been

able to say exactly what they would bring on the market.

She got off at Thirteenth Street and walked to Juniper and then down to Walnut Street. As she turned into Juniper Street she thought she saw Hop Kee's bony figure among the passers-by on the other side of Chestnut Street but she had only a glimpse before the man disappeared among the moving throng that was headed down-town. She laughed at herself for the fancy. Hop Kee was with Mr. Wong back in Belleview.

"There are thousands of Chinamen in the city," she told herself as she went into the shop. "I'm getting silly about the necklace, I believe."

She made her request to the affable gentleman in charge, who was full of regret that the expert on Oriental goods was at present out of town. He would be back in the office to-morrow and would be glad to give an opinion. Would she care to show the articles to their Mr. Griffiths? He would be in from lunch in a few minutes.

She was suddenly assailed again with that disturbing uncertainty of mind, which was unusual to her and which, consequently, was the more baffling. She hesitated, not knowing what to say, and then on an impulse, got out the beaded pouch and took the sandalwood box from its wrappers. When she had got that far, she just as abruptly changed her mind and put it back again.

"I'll come in another time, thank you," she said. "Mr. Griffiths may not care to bother with looking at the things, for, as I told you, I merely wanted to

get an idea of how much they might be worth. I was told to take them to Mr. Simons."

She went out, feeling awkward and silly. Why should she have behaved like that? She was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not notice a gaunt Chinaman in a wide-rimmed black felt hat, who had come into the store just after her and who left by the Juniper Street entrance, glide away into a near-by doorway to watch her as she went her way.

She found the walk to the house of the private dealer rather longer than she had expected. She had forgotten that Delancy Street was so far down. The man at the door told her that Mr. Simons was not at home. He had gone to New York for the day. Would she leave her name? The man's trained eye saw, in the careful way she carried her bag, that she was a prospective seller, and he was instructed to be particularly courteous to such, for treasures are found in unexpected places.

She left her card with a scribbled request for an appointment on it, and went up-town again. She was hungry and she had a sandwich at a lunch-counter where she ate with one eye on the bag and the other on the people about her. The possession of the necklace made her apprehensive. If it should be stolen ——

It was nearly three when she went into the music-store to get the Sonata and Suite. She spent a long time making her choice and then heard a number of selections on the Victrola, among others the *Fantasia* and a Chopin Prelude that she intended to

study. The last number of the Victrola concert was the *Unfinished Symphony* by Schubert and she was so lost in the rapture of its rhythms that she forgot how the minutes were passing. She had to hurry to get to the trysting place in time.

Bob was uneasy as, once again, he drew her aside. "Say, can you lend me a dollar?" he muttered in her ear. "Verna's had three sundaes and two hot chocolates since lunch but she says she's got to have another sundae, or she'll get faint on the ride home."

Roslyn was glad she had been economical with the editions of music. She felt a little sorry for Bob in his embarrassment. After they were on their way, he seemed to recover his spirits entirely, however, and he joked a good deal more than usual with Verna and repeated all the smart sayings on the comic subtitles of the movie.

"Say, Rosie," he laughed. "You ought to have seen old Hop Kee all rigged out in a regular hat and store shoes. He was making for the twelve o'clock train when we saw him. Wouldn't stop a minute. Had to be back home by one o'clock, he said. His Lordship had sent him up on an errand. My word, he certainly did beat it for the station! You'd think His Lordship was a regular tyrant."

CHAPTER XV

MISS BUMP'S YOUNG MAN APPEARS

THE morning was too early for the sun and the dark October mist hung in dense veils upon the hills. A few birds chirped, the cocks in the valley crowed from farm to farm and smoke-spirals from kitchen chimneys rose slowly on the languid air. Roslyn's hair was beaded with tiny drops of moisture, as she hurried up the lane back of the barn.

She had been over to the old graveyard in the valley in search of a weird tune that had been evading her. In the mysterious shadowy dawn she had found the right rhythm. "There's nothing like going to the right spot," she thought, happily. "Those tumble-down tombstones and broken graves all covered with dead brambles made me feel pretty spooky. I'll go over at twilight if I have to go again. That will be weirder yet."

She glanced back at the valley. Fortune Hill was draped in dull yellowish mist at its summit but she could see the dark clump of pines on its lower border. Like her own fortune, wrapped in the mists of the future. She had a sudden whim. "I'll not go up to the cave at the top until I've sent in the operetta," she said. "I'll wait till I've finished my work and then," she laughed, "I'll climb Fortune Hill."

"My good gracious, you look like you seen some-

pin funny," Gladys called to her from the back-porch. "Say," she added as Roslyn came nearer, "I seen Miss Bump last night at the drug-store and she blushed like anything when I told her that fellow had been askin' about her again. The other day when she was away ——"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Roslyn broke out. "You know she dislikes publicity."

"Well, the fellow keeps comin' when she's away," Gladys returned cheerfully. "It ain't my fault he's stuck on her. I had to give a message, if it was give me, didn' I? He pestered me so."

"You'll get into trouble, arranging a meeting for that crazy Romeo."

"Me? Not much," retorted Gladys, airily. "She's tickled pink about him. She's strong on love, you know. There may be a weddin' yet; funnier things has happened. I hope she asts me for a bridesmaid."

Roslyn laughed, helpless before such conviction. When it came to romance, there was no use trying to argue with Gladys.

"What time did Hop Kee come back yesterday?" she asked in a sudden impulse. "Mr. Bob saw him in town." She would not say more.

"Don't know exactly," Gladys replied. "He was here when I come back from Mom's. I went to get her recipee for muffins and when I come in, here he was, makin' toast for Mr. Wong, like he'd never left the place."

Roslyn moved on. No doubt, Hop Kee had been telling the truth when he had said he must catch the

twelve o'clock train. It was another Chinaman she had seen. She must not waste her thought on vague suspicions: there was so much to do; almost all of the score of *Ali Baba* to be orchestrated. She knew she had a harder task before her than she had feared. Señor Caldes had told her that in choosing the stringed quartette she had taken a most difficult task upon herself. What she had thought the simplest had turned out to be the most difficult. In the glow of morning enthusiasm, she vowed to overcome and triumph.

Mr. Wong was up and moving about in his rooms as she passed and she recalled the letter which she had meant to give him. She would deliver it immediately after Hop Kee had taken down his breakfast tray. She preferred to speak to him alone when she gave him the letter.

She met Hop Kee on the upper stair. He had Ling Loo tucked under his arm and he smiled his slow smile at her as she passed.

"Ling Loo velly bad boy," he said. "He lun 'way alle timee. I chain him velly tight, you bet."

She took it that Ling Loo had been on one of his marauding tours, and been caught by his master. She did not stop to pat the little monkey as was her custom but went on. The rhythm that had come to her in the misty graveyard and been scribbled on her tablet must be clearly written before she forgot it. She wrote studiously until the clock warned her that she would be late for breakfast if she lingered.

Muriel was in the hall, answering the 'phone. She put the receiver on the stand and turned to

Roslyn as she came down the stairs. "Will you tell Mr. Wong that Miss Beasely is calling him?" she asked, in a rather frigid tone. "He can use the extension in Father's room; there's no one there now."

Roslyn knocked and delivered the message to the closed door and then came down, smiling a little at Muriel's evident annoyance. Dear Mew, if she only knew what a goose Betty Beasely was making of herself, trying to annex Mr. Wong, who spent his time evading her! The address of the letter,—Mrs. W. Wong,—was proof that he had a good reason for evading her.

"That Betty Beasely has no taste," Muriel said, as she seated herself at the table. "Calling up before a man is out of bed. I wonder she doesn't drive over in that gaudy roadster of hers, and take him out to breakfast."

"That reminds me, I have a message for you both," said Mrs. Chilton gently. "Mr. Wong asked me last night if I would consent to make up a little party to-day. Over at Windham. He says the hotel there has a fine grille and there will be a concert at the Opera House at three. I accepted, provisionally. If you girls cannot go, of course."

Roslyn joyfully accepted,—the mention of the concert was too strong a lure,—and then she remembered the mysterious engagement with Miss Bump. It was at the same hour. She made an excuse,—the operetta,—and tried not to feel too much disappointed. Muriel hesitated but yielded to persuasion. When Mr. Wong came down to the hall to learn their decision he appeared extremely pleased

that his party was assured. His polite regret for Roslyn's absence did not greatly cloud his satisfaction.

"I shall hope to have the pleasure another time," he said courteously. "You must allow me to take you to the next concert they give over there."

She thanked him, with an uneasy memory of the letter in her desk upstairs. She felt she could not face him with it, as she had intended. When he had gone she would slip it under his door with his other mail and let him make of it what he would.

She saw them drive off with a pang of envy. It was hard to settle down to work to-day. She lingered about for a while, trying the harmonies on the old piano and then, telling Gladys she would want only a sandwich for lunch, she went up and got the letter. There was no other mail for Mr. Wong, so she slipped the letter under the door wrapped in a flimsy circular from a clothing firm. It was surprisingly hard to push through the crack but she managed it.

"That's done," she said, half aloud, and turned away, when the thought of Hop Kee came to her. He might discover the envelope before Mr. Wong returned, though he was not, as she knew, supposed to go into the bedroom when his master was not there; an odd rule for so trusty a servant.

She decided to regain the letter and stick to her original intention of giving it herself to Mr. Wong. She got down on her knees and fished for the edge of the wrapper which could be seen through the crack. But the harder she fished, the more the letter

stuck. It finally disappeared entirely and she had to leave it where it was. She blamed herself for not having given it to him before breakfast, when Muriel had asked her to deliver Betty Beasely's message.

It was a lonely day for her, for Bob had gone off even earlier than the rest to get some material for another gas-saver, which he was going to present to his fair one. He was growing uneasy lest his father might snatch him away to deliver him into the clutches of the law-school, as it was long beyond the usual time for enrollment, and he made every hour count as two. The day wore on as days will, whether glad or sad, and the hour came for her to go to Miss Bump.

She went across the close-cropped grass through the rustling leaves of the poplar-trees that made yellow patterns on the green, and the sharp tinge of coming frost was in her nostrils. The west wind was swinging to the north and the warm misty morning, with the brighter noon, was to become a cold night. "The first real frost we've had," she thought. "The snakes,—if there are any,—on Fortune Hill will all be in their holes when I go up there. In another week . . ."

She halted at the drive for an instant, half inclined to go back for her music. She might need it, though she always felt that it hindered her to keep her eyes upon the printed score.

"It really doesn't matter," she said to herself, as she went on. "Miss Bump doesn't care so much about music. She probably wants to hear me play

so that she can write about it without having to draw on her memory. The *Fantasia Impromptu* is her favorite, she said, and I know that by heart."

There was someone in the boudoir when she was ushered in by Mary, the maid. A tall man, who had been crumpled down in the low arm-chair, rose and bowed ceremoniously as Miss Bump introduced them. Roslyn did not catch his name. He had a thin, flat body and black hair clipped close to his lean brown neck. He appeared to forget her after the first casual words, and went on with the discussion of motor-cars which her entrance had interrupted.

"He's not a musician, that's flat," thought Roslyn with some relief. But in a few minutes she began to feel very much out of place, for the talk passed to electric pumps and she knew nothing of electric pumps. Miss Bump and the stranger appeared to have had great experience with them.

"I am going to have one installed in my old well," Miss Bump said with animation. "But, my dear Miss Blake, you are being bored. Won't you amuse yourself at the piano, while I show my friend the water-system I had put in last year?"

Roslyn was only too glad to escape and she went to the adjoining room with alacrity. She heard their voices fade into the distance as they explored the cellar and kitchen in their interest in the electric pump.

The piano was a perfect one, with a soft singing tone and a melodious rumbling bass and, after the old Belleview piano with the keys that stuck, it was

bliss to her fingers. She forgot herself and her surroundings and played on and on, slipping from one mood to another, from the *Fantasia* backward through the old composers to the early days of harmony. Miss Bump came in upon her almost an hour later and brought her out of her dream.

The boudoir was empty when they went back to it, and the tea-table had a ravaged look; bits of cake, half-eaten scraps of chocolates lay on it. They had had their tea while she was wandering in the world of melody. It was rather odd, she thought, but she knew that geniuses were eccentric.

"I shall certainly have the pump put in the well," remarked Miss Bump as she poured a cup of chilly tea for Roslyn. "I am sorry he had to go so soon, though. . . ."

So the stranger was an electric expert. No wonder he cared nothing for her music. Miss Bump tidied the disordered table with an absent air. Roslyn felt there was no need for words, and she drank her tea in silence. Miss Bump's mystery had ended tamely enough. She glanced out of the window that gave on the Belleview lawns, wondering when the picnic party would return, and then she sat forward, the better to see.

A figure was approaching. It was the young man she had seen talking with Gladys on the afternoon of the Circus Parade. He was coming along at a brisk rate, as if he were certain of finding the object of his pursuit at last. Miss Bump noticed her interest and turned her own eyes in the same direction.

"There is that poor mistaken man again," she said with a sort of pitying pride. "He has been following me about for weeks." She really thought he had. "I have managed to evade him. These romances that have their rise in the pages of one's fame are nothing, nothing. I know it, from many experiences. He is doomed to disappointment, poor fellow. I could never marry a man who had no more delicate way of wooing me than to enlist the services of another; and a simple country maid, at that."

The young man crossed the lawn and immediately the door-bell told that he had lost no time in reaching the front door. Miss Bump rose, sank down in the chair, arranged her dress in more graceful folds and waited till Mary appeared at the threshold. She appeared surprised at Mary's announcement, and raised her delicate eyebrows.

"Someone to see me, Mary?" she asked. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Gubbins, Miss Bump," replied the maid demurely. "He wishes to see you most particular."

Miss Bump sighed, shook her head, to indicate how reluctant she was to be disturbed. "Show him in here," she said, with resignation. "Pray do not go, my dear Miss Blake, there is no need for withdrawal."

Mr. Gubbins was a very nice young man. He bowed to each in turn with such a modest yet determined air that Roslyn liked him in spite of herself. He was much younger than she had thought him. His pink lips and mild blue eyes suggested an

amiable infant. It was hard to believe that he could be so indomitable in the pursuit of his purpose.

"Am I addressing Miss Bump?"

His blue gaze was directed to neither, but seemed to hover in the air between them. Miss Bump drew herself up slightly and spoke with dignity.

"I am Miss Bump," she said. "Amanda Bump, if you prefer."

He appeared tremendously relieved to find that she was the person he had come to see. Roslyn was surprised that he should have been in doubt at all. After what Gladys had told her, she had expected to see him fling himself at the feet of the authoress. Instead he drew out a neat card and held it as he addressed the lady of the house.

"Pardon *me,* Miss Bump, if I seem too cheeky, but I've seen your books and I know you're a sort of celebrity; that is, I should say, you are a great celebrity. Now, I know you are kind and good, and—and—I want to get married by Thanksgiving——"

"Oh, Mr. Gubbins, you are much too young," murmured Miss Bump with an almost maternal tenderness. "You must wait. You do not know m——"

"I know I'm young," the visitor interrupted brightly. "But I believe in young marriages, don't you? Your books all tell about them. I——"

"And you should know the object of your affections better," declared the authoress, enjoying herself hugely. She was almost as romantic as Gladys.

Mr. Gubbins stared at her. "Why, I've grown up

with her," he cried. "We went to the same kindergarten together."

Miss Bump's face was strange to see. For a moment Roslyn thought she was going to denounce the young man as an imposter, but in another second her frank, spontaneous laugh rang out and she cried, "So you've been planning to have a wedding at Thanksgiving? And you want me to do something for you? Why in the world didn't you say so, instead of making a mystery of it?"

"Mystery?" Mr. Gubbins' round blue eyes were wide in denial. "I didn't make a mystery of it. It isn't the style any more to mention what you've got to sell. You approach the customer from another angle. It's the psychological school of salesmanship, you know."

"Bless your heart!" cried Miss Bump with another laugh. "You certainly have learned your lesson-book well. Now, tell me what you want me to buy, so that you can get married in a fortnight or two. I warn you I won't buy any electrical fixtures,—I've got everything I need for this season."

"But that's just what I have to sell," he almost wailed. "*Everything Electric* . . . that's our motto . . ."

When Roslyn left, he was waiting for Miss Bump to make out the check for the electric pump and some new fixtures. She had already given him the letter which had been his chief aim in pursuing her; in it she declared that she recommended the Peerless Washer to all young householders and she had signed it with her well-known dashing signature.

Roslyn told Gladys when she got home, and teased her about her hopes of being a bridesmaid. Gladys, however, was not put out. She was too much of a philosopher for that.

"Well, I may not stand up with Miss Bump," she said, complacently. "But I got word jest a while ago I was to be best maid at another weddin'. Mayme Todd over to Springtown, wrote to ast me for Thanksgivin',—she's goin' to marry some boy from Phillipsburg. She wants me to wear pink georgette and carry yellow chrusanthemums,—that's French, she sayd."

Mr. Wong's car was coming up the drive and Roslyn went to the porch to meet them, eager to hear about their holiday and, when the three of them should be alone, to tell the story of the ardent Gubbins.

They came into the hall in a shower of laughter and Muriel's pretty face was bright with excitement. She could not wait until Mr. Wong had left to put the car in the garage but burst out at once.

"The concert was wonderful, and the grill at the Jackson was wonderful, too. But the best of it all was the factory. Mr. Wong took us over the whole place and he's going to have a desk in the cutest little office, right alongside of the President's private room. We saw some of the silk from the Wong warehouses. It was wonderful!"

Mr. Wong appeared well pleased with her enthusiasm. As he deposited Mrs. Chilton's wraps on the settee he said, "We must all go over again. You really haven't seen half, you know."

Mrs. Chilton looked after him with approval. "He has given us a most enjoyable day," she remarked, as she took off her gloves finger by finger. "His training in childhood has made a charmingly deferential man of him. I did not feel superfluous,—no, not for one moment. The other young men make me uncomfortable; that is why I usually refuse to go with young people."

"And you should have seen how wonderfully he managed that Betty Beasely," cried Muriel with sparkling eyes. "Imagine it, she held us up as we were going over the short cut by the post-office. Stood right out in the street and held up her hand, like a traffic cop. Of course, he had to stop. He couldn't run over her."

"I had quite a shock," Mrs. Chilton murmured, as she removed her hat and fluffed her hair before the mirror. "She came so swiftly. But the brakes worked perfectly."

"And she never asked if she could go along," Muriel went on. "She just called out, 'I'm with you, old dear. On schedule, you see.' And she wouldn't get in back with Mother, though he held the door for her, but she jumped in the front and squeezed herself down beside him. And she called him 'Wu' and 'My lad,' and I don't know what all. He was awfully put out."

"He behaved beautifully," Mrs. Chilton declared. "It was awkward for him, for it was plain he had not expected her, in spite of her greeting."

"He was polite, of course," Muriel affirmed. "But he stopped at the post-office and opened the

door of the car with one of his nice smiles. 'This is where you are going, I believe, Miss Beasely?' he said, and she got out. I will say she didn't seem cross. She just laughed."

"And at the mill, when Muriel was being shown the looms, he told me that he regretted having to take such a discourteous course, but that Miss Beasely had driven him to it. She was forming the habit of holding him up whenever she saw him in the car alone," added Mrs. Chilton. "I don't know what the girls are coming to nowadays. Hush, there is your father, Muriel. You had best go up and take off your things."

Mr. Chilton stepped into the hall with his grandest air. He had come swiftly, as was his habit, for he was always hoping to catch them in something he could disapprove of. His sharp eye caught a glimpse of his daughter as she disappeared into the hall above, and the wraps on the settee were additional evidence. Roslyn felt his gaze glance past her and rest on his wife.

"Ah, you have been taking a drive, perhaps?" he smiled, and his grey eyebrows took an upward angle. "You all appear in festive attire and I take it there has been some entertainment . . ."

"Mr. Wong invited us to lunch," Mrs. Chilton replied evenly, and the light died out of her face. "Roslyn did not go. Only Muriel and myself. Are you home for good now, James, or do you still have business in town?"

It was plain to Roslyn that she asked the question merely to turn his attention from the subject of

their drive, but he took it in an entirely different sense. He frowned at her but did not speak at once. Roslyn began to leave the hall, and his tone made her move somewhat faster.

"When I come or when I go is not the subject for dispute, I trust," he almost snarled. "My business is my business and no other's. I shall enlighten you, my love, when I please —— Ah, Mr. Wong," his tone changed to cordial welcome. "My dear ones have been in your keeping, I hear, for the greater part of this happy day. That is right, that is right, 'gather ye rosebuds while ye may,' you know. I hope you found them pleasant companions? My daughter Muriel has been thought a good conversationalist by some."

Roslyn fled. She found Muriel in the upper hallway, red with annoyance. "Listen to him," she whispered. "He's going at it as bad as ever. Oh, dear, why did he come home and spoil everything? I sha'n't look at Mr. Wong after this."

Roslyn tried to comfort her but in her heart she was glad, for once in her half-year with the Honorable James, that he had come home. That letter to Mrs. Wong was in her mind. Mr. Wong, she thought, was just as polite to Roslyn herself as to Muriel, but Muriel's rather sentimental nature was more easily touched by such courtesies, and Roslyn thanked whatever power had guided Mr. Chilton's steps toward his own threshold.

Mr. Han returned the next day with the news that he would soon be leaving them. Imperative business would call him to China, he told them. He

seemed rather more silent and thoughtful than usual, and his kind face wore an anxious expression at times when he thought himself unobserved. Roslyn was genuinely sorry to learn of his departure, for she had become greatly attached to him in the short period of his stay.

Dr. Briggs came over after dinner and he, too, was disappointed in the news. "I thought we two old fellows were going to do our bit together," he said as he sat down stiffly in the chair by the fire in the hall. "I'm afraid I'll make a poor fist of it alone."

Mr. Chilton was reading some advertisements of Los Angeles realtors but he looked up sharply. "Do I understand that you gentlemen are about to engage in business?" he inquired, hungrily. "If you would consult me, I might be able to advise. I have had experience——"

"Not at all, my dear sir," Dr. Briggs broke in. "It was a figure of speech, as it were. Life in Belleview, the winter weather, and all that. We two old fellows need company,—someone to understand how our old bones creak in the cold."

Mr. Han nodded gravely. "The demon of old age is in my bones," he murmured, with a deprecatory gesture. "I, also, had hoped for a companion. But I shall remember my friend the Doctor and try to be worthy of such an honorable friend. As the Lord Buddha says, 'Great is the fruit of earnest contemplation when set round with upright conduct.'"

Roslyn realized then that no one had told Mr. Chilton of the proposed biography and that neither

Mr. Han nor the Doctor appeared willing to do so. In fact, it seemed that they preferred to keep the master of the house in ignorance of the project. Their talk about old age was merely an effort to turn attention to another subject.

"I am glad I didn't tell him," she thought, as she rose to excuse herself. "He would want to edit it himself and that would spoil everything. Dr. Briggs may not make a success of it but he'll do his best, and he's a kind, good man."

She left them all there before the fire together and at the landing she glanced down at them. They made a pleasant picture, grouped around the leaping blaze with the ruddy flicker on their faces, and she stood for a second looking down with a half-smile on her lips. A shadow flitted along the smooth wall beside her and disappeared. The light in the front hall was burning high and cast a pattern of bars upon the stairway. Someone had passed along the hall between her and the light; swift and silent and furtive.

"Gladys went home to-night," she thought quickly. "And all the others are down there," and suddenly she smiled again. "Why, of course it's Hop Kee," she said in relief. "In his padded shoes."

She went upstairs to her upper room, smiling at her own flightiness. "I'll be looking under the bed for burglars next," she thought, as she sat down to the desk. "I'd better get to work now. Only another day and it's only half copied. I've got to take it in day after to-morrow, when I take the

snuff-bottle and—yes, I'll take the necklace again this time . . . or perhaps I won't . . . I'll wait till I have this operetta off my mind before I decide. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

SHADOWS

Roslyn handed the package to the postmaster, Mr. Hopkins. It was remarkably small, considering the amount of labor it had cost her.

"I want to send it registered mail, please," she said, and she laid down one of her precious hoarded dollars.

Mr. Hopkins peered at it through his great horn spectacles, like a hungry bird at a fat worm. Letters and packages were eagerly received by the post-office of Belleview, for it was Hopkins' ambition to handle enough mail to raise the standing of the office from fourth to third class. He pursed his lips thoughtfully, as he weighed the parcel with a quick flip of the scales that scored heavily.

"Sixty-seven cents, *and* the usual amount for registry," he announced with relish and then he re-read the address. "Mr. Carl Lubivizc, heh?" he muttered. "Conservatory of Music, heh? I guess you know pretty much all the big bugs of the musician folks. Miss Bump told me, when I was speaking of that friend of hers, Madame So-and-so, that you'd been playing for her. I was right disappointed not to have had the chance to ask the lady to the Ball. She'd have been another drawing card."

Roslyn murmured something inaudible as she took the change. The remembrance of the

Countess' visit was not among her happiest memories.

Mr. Hopkins counted the coins twice, after his careful custom. "There you are, right as a trivet," he remarked cheerily. "And what's this I hear about the engagement that's going to be printed in *The Spirit?* You folks up at Belleview House do things on jig-time, I'll say. Moved in, got settled, had all the notabilities wanting to meet you at the Ball, and now the young lady has picked off that young prince or whatever he is. Her father was telling me about it just a bit ago. . . ."

Roslyn's cheeks burned as she answered indifferently, "We haven't heard it ourselves yet. Mr. Chilton must have been joking. He does, sometimes. He's fond of jokes, you know."

She was conscious that Mr. Hopkins was staring at her as she went out of the post-office and she wished she had possessed a readier wit to shield Muriel from the hurt her father was bent on doing her. That Mr. Chilton was not possessed of the facts about the young nobleman that she had, made little difference in the bad taste he displayed in pressing the matter as he did. As she went along the homeward road, the scarlet branch of a red oak brought her father vividly to her. He had loved the red oaks beyond other trees and for his sake she had loved them, too. She stopped and got a spray to carry home with her and the old-time habit of thought came upon her.

"Perhaps Mr. Wong has really spoken to him," she thought more leniently. "In China they have

more wives than one . . . but Mew would never . . ."

She saw Mr. Han coming toward her and on the impulse of the moment she hurried to meet him.

"I've just heard some gossip about Mr. Wong and ——" she stopped, halted by the upraised hand. She was surprised to see that Mr. Han's kind face was stern.

"I wish to hear nothing, nothing," he said with frigid dignity. "I have taken my leave and am on my way to engage my passage. I have paid my respects to the dear lady who has showered me with her kindnesses," he went on in a milder tone, "and I have said farewell to the good Dr. Briggs. It is well that we meet, for I shall carry a fragrant memory of you back to my old home. As a plum-blossom among the green leaves, so would our friendship have been . . ."

"But must you go so soon?" she cried. "You didn't intend to go so soon."

"As the Master says, 'The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort.' Though I may not be a superior man, yet I must not be a small one. I go to serve my friends. Farewell and a thousand flowery thanks."

She looked after him in speechless amazement. What had happened? Two days ago he had spoken of going to the silk-mill with them when they went, and here he was, already on his way to China. She wished she might run after him to protest and plead.

She went home the more quickly for the en-

counter. She must find out why Mr. Han was leaving before his time and with a cloud upon his kind face. She did not dream of connecting it with the rumored engagement and so it was with astonishment that she had the explanation from Muriel, who told it with angry sobs.

"Father couldn't screw up his courage to corner Mr. Wong," she said, wiping her eyes. "So he went to Mr. Han. I heard him myself. I didn't mean to but I was in the hall and they talked rather loud. I ought to have gone away but I was so ashamed that my legs wouldn't budge. He asked Mr. Han to make a settlement on me, a marriage settlement! And he was horrid when Mr. Han told him he could not. I never knew how horrid he could be . . ." and she wept again. "He told Mr. Han that his room would be better than his company!"

Roslyn tried to comfort her though her heart was not in it; she knew it was for the best that Mr. Han had refused to sponsor the affair. Muriel was not to be comforted. Her gentle nature had been roused at last and she was surprisingly hard.

"I will never allow Father to mention the subject again," she vowed. "I am going to see him as soon as he comes in and I shall tell him that I am of age and need no one to manage my affairs. Don't talk to me, Roslyn, for it's no use. I've stood enough. I won't stand any more. I'm going for a walk but as soon as he comes in, I'll see him."

Roslyn sighed as she went to her room. Everything seemed to have gone wrong since yesterday when Mrs. Chilton had been kept in her room with

a sore throat. Muriel had begged her to postpone her visit to the city until the doctor from Jonesville,—telephoned for by Mr. Chilton,—should come over to pass judgment on her mother's case. Muriel was helpless before illness and too easily alarmed to make a good nurse. Roslyn had agreed to stay home for a day or two until Mrs. Chilton would be about again, and had sent her operetta by the post instead of taking it herself as she had planned.

She had a note from Mr. Simons, appointing a day next week for her to come to him with her business, and she had gladly accepted the date. In that one item fortune favored her; but otherwise it wore a pucker on its brow. Miss Bump had asked to borrow Gladys for a small dinner-party to some authors who were passing through on their way to the coast, and dinner at Belleview had not been particularly successful. Mr. Chilton had complained of the roast and of the pudding, and taken it out on Bob, who received his father's taunts less meekly than usual. Mr. Wong, fortunately, had been out.

"And now dear Mr. Han has gone," she thought. "And Muriel is going to have trouble; dear Mew, she hasn't a chance against her father. He'll make her pay for every word she says. Well, there's only one thing I'm thankful for and that is, the operetta has gone. I sha'n't hear about it, of course, for a couple of weeks."

She would not acknowledge to herself how much depended on the fate of *Ali Baba*. A scholarship at the Conservatory,—a boarding scholarship,—would mean more to her than the sale of the snuff-bottle,

for it would take her into the student world as one who had won her place, not bought it. She began to count the days before she could hope for news of it. Capponi had said they would be prompt in the award as the season had already begun and it would be desirable for the fortunate student to begin the term as early as possible.

"I'll not expect to hear before the end of next week at the earliest," she thought, and in spite of her common-sense she began to make happy pictures of the music-room at the Conservatory with a group of eager students discussing Beethoven or Mozart,—herself among them,—working joyously and sharing their enthusiasms. "With the money from the snuff-bottle, I can manage beautifully," she thought and then shook herself out of the land of dreams, half-afraid that such frail visionings would endanger her chances for the award.

"I'll go and see how Mrs. Chilton is and then I'll help Gladys with the vegetables for dinner," she said. "There's plenty to do, besides practising."

Mrs. Chilton was so far recovered that she had dressed and was about to go downstairs. She looked very white and tired but her eyes were as serene and her voice as sweet as ever. Roslyn felt the same tenderness and admiration for her that she had felt when she first entered the house as a stranger. Mrs. Chilton was one of those poised characters who wear well in everyday contact. She smiled at Roslyn and welcomed her into her room.

"I'm so fumigated and disinfected that I feel I'll never need another spraying," she said with her

tinkling laugh. "Dr. Cheston says it was a rheumatic throat,—not at all contagious,—but I like to be on the safe side. Did you mail your operetta yet? I'm so glad you finished it in time. I was afraid my illness interfered with your work——"

"Indeed, no," cried Roslyn, earnestly. "It was because I was so slow myself. Song writing isn't so bad but I'll never try to write for an orchestra again. If I——"

"Hem!"

It was the Honorable James who had come to the open door unnoticed and now stood looking at them from under his brows with his most supercilious stare. As soon as he saw the effect he produced, he smiled and spoke in his smoothest voice.

"Don't let me disturb you in your chat, my love. Pray go on, Roslyn. I am deeply interested in your future, as you are aware. I had dropped in to inform you, my love, that I am about to take a short trip. Have you seen my linen suit?"

Whatever surprise his wife might have felt at such a request, she did not show it, but answered evenly, "It is in the storeroom, in the lower row of boxes. In a brown paper suit-box, tied with green string."

"May I venture to ask you to get it for me?" he purred. "No, Roslyn, do not disturb yourself. My wife prefers to manage these things herself, I have found. But, since you are going, would you be so good as to request Robert to bring my wicker trunk from the attic where I understand it was bestowed?"

Roslyn went to deliver the message, wondering at

his ability to place himself always in the right. Far from feeling compunction at making his wife lift down the heavy boxes in the storeroom, he seemed to complain of her stubbornness in excluding him from his own storeroom. She hoped that he would be speedy in his preparations.

"I'll go meet Mew and tell her," she thought as she left Bob. "She won't have to make a fuss, now that he's going away for a while."

Muriel's tears had dried and her cheeks were bright with the crisp west wind; she had been over to the cemetery in the valley, and was full of admiration for an old tomb there, which had a figure of an angel seated on it. "You ought to see it, Roslyn," she said. "It's hidden behind some juniper trees and it's overgrown with vines. I saw only the head at first and then I pulled away some of the woodbine and found it was a whole, life-sized figure. It has the loveliest face. Do go see it when you're over in that direction."

Whether it was the effect of the angel or because she felt a little ashamed of her outbreak, she did not say a word when Roslyn told her of her father's proposed trip. She listened and nodded and finally remarked in her usual amiable tone, "He must be going to Bermuda. I've got a book on Bermuda he might like to look over. I'll bring it down at dinner-time." They loitered a while in the bright sunshine, talking of trifles.

Gladys was on the back porch as they came in through the shrubberies. Her eyes and mouth were both open wider than usual. "Say," she called in a

loud, hissing whisper. "Don't go in by the front. Come around this way. *He's* on the rampage. He's givin' it to Mr. Bob somepin fierce." When they were in the kitchen, she added with intense scorn, "He's been slammin' me good and plenty lately about the cookin' and all, but I don't mind him. Listen at him, scoldin'. My, ain't he the limit?"

"Make haste, you dolt," Mr. Chilton's voice came rasping through the quiet halls. "Ha, you have ruined the trunk-label. I told you it was not dry. Blacksmith, dullard! A fine lawyer, forsooth, you'd be, with your workman's hands and your dull wits. Give me the little bag, and take out that trunk and those two suitcases before the car comes,—if you don't want to feel the weight of my hand. Move, dunce!"

Roslyn had to put a hand on Muriel's shoulder to restrain her. All the calm that her walk had given her was wiped away at the sound of the harsh voice that echoed through the hall. "Bob can take care of himself," she whispered in Muriel's ear. "You'd only make things worse."

Muriel's face was flushed and she pulled herself away. "I don't care. I can't stand him talking that way to Bob," she began, when suddenly the front door slammed and there was silence in the hall. The sound of a motor came from the front drive and Gladys rushed to the side-window peering out excitedly.

"That's him, goin' away in the taxi!" she cried. "All his traps, and skedaddlin' to beat Father Time. I guess he'd have missed the train if he'd gabbed a

bit longer. Land of Goshen, he did hop off quick, didn't he?"

Muriel did not hear her last words, for she had disappeared to find Bob; but Roslyn shook her head at the lively maid. "You oughtn't to speak of Mr. Chilton that way," she said. "It isn't right."

Gladys stared. "Well, wasn't he gabbin' ? That's a mild word for it, if you ast me." Her forehead puckered with perplexity. "Say, Miss Roslyn, why do you folks all pertend he's a grand man? Seems to me, that's sorta like a lie. If he was my old man, I'd give him a line of talk that 'ud wake him up a bit, I can tell you. These here shams and pertendin' you like folks when you despise 'em, ain't right, I think ——"

Roslyn did not hear the rest, for she had left the kitchen. She was so astonished at the abrupt departure of the master of the house that she fairly ran to the hall, where Bob and Muriel were. "Has he really gone?" she asked, incredulously. "For a long trip like that, without saying good-bye?" It was astounding conduct, even for the Honorable James.

Bob went out without reply; his face was white and shaken. Muriel answered in a strange voice, "Bob says he told him he would never see him again but that was only one of his threats; he likes to frighten us, you know." When Bob had disappeared, she added, in a lower tone, "Did you hear? He told Bob he'd thrash him if he wasn't quicker with the trunk and bags. Bob was bringing them down for him, you see. I'm going up to see how

Mother takes it. She's pretty weak, but," Muriel's mild eyes flashed, "she ought to be better *now*. He won't be bullying her for a while, anyway."

"I'm glad Mr. Wong isn't here for dinner to-night," Roslyn said. "He's still over in Windham, isn't he?"

"Don't speak of him to me," Muriel retorted sharply, as she glanced back over her shoulder. "I'd like never to hear his name again."

Roslyn was about to speak when she saw Hop Kee emerge from the pantry with Ling Loo on his shoulder. He was as inscrutable as ever and it was hard to tell whether he had overheard their talk or not. He passed into the back hall and thence up the back-stairs to his room almost without a sound. There was something so silent, so relentless in that smooth noiseless gliding step of his that Roslyn felt suddenly uncomfortable. Her first uneasy suspicion of him flared up again, in spite of reason or commonsense.

"I wish Mr. Han had taken him with him," she thought, as she listened to the distant sound of his softly-closing door. "He's always creeping about when you don't expect him . . . lately . . ."

Yes, now that she thought of it, lately she had met Hop Kee more and more frequently. At the turn of the stair; at the angle of the upper hallway: once she had seen him in the village reflected in a shop-window following her but when she had turned, he had disappeared: once he had surprised and startled her by appearing at her open door; he had given Ling Loo as an excuse for his presence and

had vanished as Bob came shouting up after her to help him in the shop. She shivered a little as she recalled the numerous encounters. For a moment, she felt as if a great net were about to be flung about her. Then she laughed aloud, an empty laugh at her own folly.

"That operetta has got on my nerves," she thought. "I'll try Mew's medicine; I'll go out for a walk. Everyone will feel better by the time I come back."

She went to her room to get her thick old sweater in place of her coat, and, once again, she shivered nervously. She would never be free from apprehension until the necklace was safe in the hands of Mr. Simons. On an impulse, she got out the sandalwood box and took the necklace from its wrappings. "I'll wear it and then I'll be sure it can't get lost," she told herself. "I can feel it about my neck, though no one can see it, and with this big safety-pin and this ribbon wrapped about it, I can't lose it."

She went by the barn-lane and struck out across the valley in the opposite direction from her favorite path around the foot of Fortune Hill. She did not want to climb the Hill now and look for the cave and the lake: all the triumph that she had expected to feel upon the completion of the operetta had evaporated just as she had written the address upon the small, flat package. She did not want to learn her fortune at this hour, for she had a premonition that it would not be a happy one.

It took a long walk to bring her back to Belleview in a less despondent frame of mind. The sun was

low in the west as she turned into the barn-lane again, and the clouds hung dark across the heavens. A band of pinkish-copper glowed under the dull grey blanket of the cloud-sheet and brightened the windows of the old shop, and, for a moment, she thought the lamp was lighted within.

She halted and pushed the door open and found it dark and cold. A figure sat by the table with its head upon its hands.

"Bobs," she cried softly and went to him.

He looked up at her out of clear eyes. The glow from the west shone on his face and she saw, with surprise, that he looked neither hurt nor angry. He had not been brooding over his wrongs, as she had feared, but had been occupied with other things.

"I was trying to think out the best way to make the gas-saver lighter and more durable," he said, without preface. "Mr. Wong's has worn out; the tube was too thin . . ." and he talked on, demonstrating in the twilight his idea for a new model.

She perched on the edge of the table opposite and listened, with a little song in her heart. She loved Bob dearly and had dreaded the effect of his father's treatment of him; she had half-expected to find him in one of his sullen rages. Instead he talked of some new books he wanted to get, and from that drifted into an argument over the new instrument for measuring the distance of the stars. Roslyn was surprised, though she knew his love for science, to find how much he knew of the subject. Night came on as they talked and the shop was filled with shadows. Bob suddenly changed the subject, speak-

ing more freely in the veiling dimness. He even spoke of the incident in the hall, though his voice grew husky with embarrassment as he went on.

"I guess the Governor isn't made like other people," he said, slowly. "He can't see things like we do. I was pretty hot about the way he jumped on me, but—say, Rosie, did you listen to that bit of Revelation that he read the other Sunday morning when he got the notion to have family prayers? About the New Jerusalem, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it? Golly, when I thought about that and thought what a chance it gave a fellow, I . . . well . . . I made up my mind . . . don't laugh . . . that I'd have a whack at that, too . . . bringing some glory and honor. Not much, but some . . . and I have to try to be fit . . . You understand that . . ."

The darkness hid his face and his voice trailed off. She found his hand, and they sat in silence for a while. Then Roslyn said, under her breath, "It's a glorious company, Bobs darling. All who have overcome and all who ——"

She broke off as a shadow passed the window. She sprang up and went to the door. Bob hurried after her out into the twilight.

"What is it? What's the matter?" he asked, alert and eager.

She looked about the empty yard. "I thought someone passed the window," she said, with a laugh. "I guess I'm getting '*the nair-vous,* like the American ladies have,' as Frau Vroom used to say.

There's Gladys calling. Dinner must be ready. Come along, Bobs."

He lingered to take a look about the yard and then caught up to her. "You've been seeing things, Rosie," he laughed. "I'll tell Dr. Briggs to give you some tonic. Golly, but I'm hungry. That roast chicken smells swell, doesn't it?"

Roslyn answered gaily and they went indoors by way of the kitchen. Hop Kee was just coming out of the pantry with a saucer of sliced bananas in his hand. He grinned at them.

"Ling Loo likee bandans velly much. He blin good boy allee day. He get a plesent for him stomach, sure," and he went upstairs with the present for Ling Loo.

A gust of chill wind struck Roslyn as she passed the pantry and she glanced into the small lighted room. The window that overlooked the back porch was wide open.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HONORABLE JAMES SPEAKS FROM AFAR

"I MUST say, Margaret, you seem to have a white elephant on your hands in this great barn of a place," Miss Sarah Gordon remarked as she drew off her gloves and looked about her. "Not that it is not rather imposing in a way, but with one maid you will have a life of drudgery here."

"It is rather large," replied her sister quietly. "We have a whole wing that has not been opened. But tell us about yourself, Sally. Your letters haven't been very enlightening, and we want to hear about your apartment and your friends——"

"Friends!" Miss Sarah elevated her aristocratic nose. "I can tell you about one friend, if you like. That odious person who came here to see your fire-screens. He proved to be a serpent indeed."

"Mr. Bullden?" exclaimed Muriel, laying down her embroidery. "He seemed such a mild pleasant person. What has he done?"

Miss Sarah turned to her niece with her cheeks flushing. "What has he done?" she echoed. "My dear, he had the effrontery to sell me a candle-stand that I have discovered to be a modern affair. He said he had found it hidden in the ashes of an old forge in the country and he got seventy-five good dollars out of my purse for it, the creature!"

Bob woke up out of the pages of the *Advanced*

Chemistry he had been lost in, and he stared at his aunt. "A candle-stand?" he asked. "Did you say a candle-stand? Was it a sprangly affair with a bent top to it? My word, he is a bandit! He bought that from me and I told him I had made it. He vowed I was bluffing him, though. Perhaps he really thought it an old one."

Miss Sarah shook her head. "Alas, I cannot be so sanguine, Robert Allyngham," she replied. "He tried to sell copies of your mother's fire-screens to a dear friend of mine. . . . He is not what I thought him. The creature! I don't mind the trifling sum but to be so duped by a male person of *his* grade!"

"I didn't like his angel face myself," Bob remarked cheerfully. "I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Sarah, that he did you up, though ——"

"Never mind that, Robert Allyngham," returned his aunt, softening under his sympathy. "Let us forget the person, and speak on more congenial topics. Why are you not at college?" she pounced on the subject as lightly and delicately as an amiable Persian kitten might have pounced on a catnip ball.

Roslyn thought she looked like a fine, dignified Persian cat with her fluffy hair and her large serious eyes as she sat there listening to Bob's plans; a high-bred, affectionate cat with all the cattiness left out. She thought, "I wish she'd take the fancy to help Bobs through school. He's right about not taking money from his father after the way he's been treated these last months. But Miss Sarah is fond of him and she might as well give him the money

now as to wait till she leaves it to him in her will, as she told Mew she was going to."

Miss Sarah, however, listened to Mrs. Chilton's explanation of Bob's delayed enrollment with a show of indifference. She saw through the cloak with which Mrs. Chilton tried to cover the facts.

"James and his tantrums!" she remarked icily. "They're at the bottom of it; you can't tell me. I know him. Don't try to deny it, Margaret, for it stands to reason that if he were a proper-minded father he'd have turned heaven and earth to put a son like Robert Allyngham forward. I'll say no more, but fancy! James going off in silence and secrecy like that. There's something behind it, you may depend. Now, Muriel, my dear, put away that embroidery and come upstairs with your mother and Roslyn. I've got a few trifles in my bag . . ."

Roslyn went with them to the upstairs sitting-room. Miss Sarah was to have the rooms deserted by the Honorable James, though she did not know to whom they had belonged, or she might have refused to lodge there. Her old grudge against her brother-in-law had lost nothing in the weeks that she had been away from the family; indeed, it appeared to have grown stronger, if possible. On the other hand, Roslyn thought, as she followed the others to the cozy room, that Miss Gordon was even more devoted to her sister and her children than ever.

The trifles turned out to be generous gifts; to Mrs. Chilton a rose-colored silk sweater; to Muriel a beautiful old-fashioned brooch and earring set of

turquoises; while Roslyn's present was a book of Chopin's *Nocturnes and Preludes,* a large and well-selected collection printed on fine, strong, white paper.

"It's like a celebration of some sort; a birthday or anniversary," laughed Mrs. Chilton. "You've been extravagant, Sally."

Miss Sarah beamed on her and nodded smilingly at the two girls. "It *is* a celebration, my dears," she declared. "A sort of modern declaration of independence. Or a freedom party, if you prefer, Margaret. I'm celebrating the fact that——"

Gladys stood at the door. "Please, Mrs. Chilton, old Hopkins sent this over by his Cora. He says will you sign on this line," and she held out a special delivery letter and the book open and ready for signature. "He says it's just come, which 'ud be a miracle, for he likes to keep 'em a bit. Holds 'em up to the light and reads all he can——"

"That will do, Gladys," said Mrs. Chilton as she took the pencil and wrote her name on the blank. Her face was anxious and she dismissed Gladys as soon as possible.

"It's from Father," exclaimed Muriel, who got a glimpse of the writing on the envelope. "Oh dear, he must be coming——" she stopped herself with an effort; even before Aunt Sarah she would not reveal her true feeling toward her unnatural parent, if she could help it.

Mrs. Chilton looked up from the closely written sheet. "I will sit down to read it," she said rather weakly, and sank into the nearest chair.

"Mother dearest!" cried Muriel and she sprang to her side. "What is it? Is he——"

Mrs. Chilton waved her off with a gentle hand. They all three sat in intent silence as she read and re-read the two pages of the letter. When she had ended and folded the sheets, she sat up and drew a long, deep breath as if she were almost too fatigued to speak. Her face was calm; though as Roslyn well knew that was no indication of her inner feelings.

She began in a low voice that grew stronger as she went on. "Your father, Muriel, has gone to New Zealand, to visit his cousin Reginald,—you remember those photographs of the mansion and the park with the deer? He says he shall not return but will make his home there——"

"Thank God," burst from Miss Sarah fervidly.

"With Reginald Chilton or in the near-by city of Aukland," continued her sister evenly. "He sent this letter from San Francisco, just as he embarked. It came by air-mail, as you see," and she showed the envelope.

There was a minute of silence; no one except Miss Gordon wanted to show their real feelings but each felt as she did. Muriel was the first to speak.

"What are we to live on?" she asked. "It must have taken a lot of money to go to New Zealand and he, even he, wouldn't expect to live on his relations there——"

"Hush, my dear, I am coming to that," said her mother. "He has made provision for me,—a small annuity, he says, in some trust company, and what

I have is always yours as you know, my darling," she opened the letter again. "He has arranged for Bob to go to the Henderson School, he writes."

"Henderson! A charity school!" cried Muriel.

"Robert Allyngham an apprentice to blacksmiths and engine-men," Miss Sarah's voice was ice itself. "That's James to the life."

"What else does he say, Mother? You are hiding something," Muriel went on in great agitation. "Do read it all."

Mrs. Chilton raised her hand. "There is Gladys at the gong, and we must go to lunch," she said, folding the letter. "Pray compose yourself, Muriel. We must not allow ourselves to be subjects for village gossip," and she led the way to the dining-room, with her head more erect than usual and a deep flush on her cheeks but otherwise entirely herself.

Roslyn was surprised at the effect of that letter on the various members of the family. Bob and she talked it over in the shop after lunch.

"Mew was his favorite and he was always nice to her until last year when she wouldn't marry that stupid millionaire from Mexico," he said. "It's funny how hard on him she is; never knew she had it in her."

"Perhaps it's because she really cares for him," suggested Roslyn, "and is disappointed that he left her without a word or even a message in this letter. When people are hurt, they act that way, sometimes."

"P'raps," replied Bob briefly. "That's not my

guess but it's as good as another. Now the way I take it, we're in luck that it happened while we have a chance to look about us. If His Lordship weren't here, we'd be pretty short of cash. I'll hop right in and get a job, of course, but I can't make much at first; so the money from Wong will come in mighty handy."

"Your mother might sell the house," suggested Roslyn. "That ought to last a good while."

He shook his head. "Nothing doing. This place was for sale for five years, old Aaron told me. 'It's too big fer a pore feller and it ain't got the style no more fer a rich one,' he says. 'Ef your pap hadn't ben a newcomer he'd never sot foot in it. There's places all around thick as blackberries that are twict as temptin' as "old Bruce's Folly," as we calls it.' And Aaron knows what he's talking about. We couldn't sell it in years."

Roslyn gave up. Her own small fortune was out of reach or she might have offered to help; as it was, she had only a few dollars in her iron bank, the snuff-bottle, the necklace and a vague promise for the future from her guardian. The remembrance of that promise made her uneasy; what had he said about the investment? That it would bring good returns later on.

"There's Mother and she's beckoning you," Bob pointed through the window. "I hope it's good news for you, Rosie, for you sure deserve it. You've been such a brick; to put up with everything."

He fairly pushed her out the door, saying in her ear, "If it's good news, come back afterward, will

you? We'll take our hike up Fortune Hill and give Aunt Sally a chance to blow off steam . . ."

Mrs. Chilton's face looked pale against the soft grey fur of her coat collar. She did not smile at Roslyn but walked on with her to the barn-lane and stood looking out across the valley without making an effort to speak. Roslyn felt swift apprehension at her unusual silence, and she broke out impulsively.

"If it's anything unpleasant about my legacy, please tell me," she exclaimed, with a hand on her friend's arm. "Don't feel bad, whatever it is——"

"Mr. Chilton bought this house with your money," the voice was low and cold. "That was why I never saw the deed. I should have known. I blame myself. He arranged everything. He bought this house as your guardian, and then forced me to sign away my house in town; I could not protest when all was arranged. Instead of putting the money from my house into the purchase of this one, as I thought he did, he bought this great dilapidated place with your funds." She looked about her as if seeing it for the first time. "It would take a fortune to put the stables and barns in repair," she murmured. "He was mad, as I told him at the time; but how mad I did not guess."

Roslyn tried to say that it did not matter, that she had some other resources. The scholarship might come to her. Mrs. Chilton did not pay any attention to her. "And no one in their senses would rent the house," she insisted. "We can never sell it and get your money out of it for you. It is quite

impossible at present for me to pay the six weeks' rent that I owe you."

"But you don't owe any rent," Roslyn assured her with deep gratitude. "Please, please don't talk that way. I can't bear it. You have been so lovely to me . . ."

It was no use to try to cheer her; she could bear disaster for herself but for this girl who had been entrusted to them to be stripped of her rightful income was bitter indeed to her. She had one hope, and that was in the lawyer, Mr. Laird. "When he comes back, we shall be able to know exactly what to do," she said. "Mr. Chilton says he sent a letter with full instructions and suggestions to him at his office. He has resigned his post of guardian, my dear. I think, on the whole, it is the best thing for you."

This was the harshest word she ever said about the Honorable James. She left Roslyn presently and went back to the house, and Roslyn went desolately about in the shrubberies, walking back and forth around the S-shaped paths in an effort to think out some clear line of conduct. If she won the scholarship . . .

The sight of Hop Kee watching her from the corner of the wood-shed gave her a start. She moved away, striking out across the lawn toward the entrance gates, not because she wanted to go in that direction but because it took her farther from the sight of spying Hop Kee. At the gate she met Jim Bradley pedalling along on his bicycle. He hopped off as he saw her, and waved an envelope.

"Here's another,—for you this time," he called. "Gosh, the post-office better move out here, if it keeps on. Twict since noon is going some. Cora Hopkins told me she brought the first one before dinner. Catch holt, will you?"

He was willing to wait while she opened it but she did not indulge his curiosity. She handed him the signed blank and turning, went back toward the shrubberies. Her heart was pounding, for the address on the envelope was in Capponi's flourishing hand.

"It's only been a week," she told herself. "The judges haven't had time . . ."

The words danced before her, until they sank deep into her heart, like stones around the neck of her drowning hope. "The Committee have been most quick. They have known from the first who the winner would be, I believe. It is a great disappointment to me. Although you have failed, to you it must be but a step along the hard road to success. Already I have sold the song of the wood-chopper to Presser. It will not bring much but it will go in a collection of songs for children that will carry your name into notice . . ."

She went out past the barns, past the stables, into the rutted lane that led into the valley's southern end. She would not look at Fortune Hill. She hated the paltry song. So much wasted labor; so much useless study!

It took an hour to walk off the first bitterness of defeat. She came back about three o'clock to find Gladys searching nooks and corners for her.

"My lands alive, but I have had a turn!" the good-natured girl breathed, standing still to wait for her to join her. "I got sort of scary, I guess, what with the house bein' so quiet and all, and I sort of thought you'd been kidnapped, like I see in the papers every day."

"Kidnapped?" echoed Roslyn with a forced laugh. "Who in the world would do that? There isn't——"

The queer expression on Gladys' round face cut her short. She saw her answer in the other's face. Gladys drew close to whisper, "That Hop Kee. He keeps his eye on you lately. I've just noticed it. I sorta got to like him but I guess he's a snake in the grass all right!"

Roslyn tried to throw off the fear that clutched her heart at these words. She told herself that Gladys was always acting out some movie drama and she herself was not in her normal state of mind, after the strain and indecision of the last fortnight; it might be that both of them were troubled with too active an imagination.

"Nobody wants to kidnap me, you foolish thing," she laughed in a rather strained way. "Hop Kee has always been slipping about here and there where one doesn't expect him. It's his way, I imagine."

"Well, all I know is," remarked Gladys as she followed Roslyn to the house, "that I wish he could talk United States. I'd give him an ear full. He don't understand half you say to him, the dumb-bell."

At this very moment the subject of her remarks

was standing in a respectful attitude in the study of a house on Delancy Street, listening to an answer to his discreet questions.

"Yes, I told your young lady that I would be able to see her day after to-morrow," Mr. Simons was saying, affably. "If it is, as you say and as my good friend Dr. Smithers described it, a necklace of such rare jade, I shall have no difficulty in securing a large sum for it. You may tell her so and ask her to bring it as early in the afternoon as possible. I shall be going over to the meeting of the Savants as soon as she leaves."

Hop Kee bowed deferentially and answered in his best pigeon-English, "I telle her velly quick. She bling it, so you take look-see long time bliffore two o'clock. Yes sir."

When he went down the steps to the street there was a cheerful expression on his yellow face. He was thinking with great satisfaction of the smooth way that his plan was being carried out. "The young lady will have to entrust it to my insignificant keeping at once, since the honorable Lord Simons has delivered the knowledge of its whereabouts to me. I was in doubt that the illustrious Han had taken it with him, but now I am certain that she possesses it. Since the box is empty, she must have it upon her. I will now offer thanks for deliverance from doubt," he thought in his most satisfying native language.

He sought the upper floor of a dark house on Race Street, where he burned a bundle of joss-sticks before the bronze Buddha, and then, having consumed

a bowl of rice in the ante-room to the joss-house, he went serenely to the railway station, with his hands tucked in the sleeves of his padded coat.

"To do one's duty is to touch heaven," he ruminated piously, as he purchased a ticket for Smithville, an obscure station between Belleview and Jonesville.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ANGEL IN THE MOONLIGHT

Dr. Briggs came over just before dinner. He found Roslyn in the music-room, fussing over her music, arranging it in piles; Chopin, Debussy, Mozart and the others, each in their separate shelf. The rest of the family had not come downstairs.

He shook hands heartily and refused to let her call the others.

"I've just dropped in for a minute on my way home from town," he told her, and he looked about the hall. "This is the first time I've been over in this direction for a good spell, and do you know, the house seems rather quiet to me without my good friend Han. A great disappointment. I had hoped for his companionship. 'A friend in need is a friend indeed.'"

"We all miss him," she returned sincerely. "It is only about a week since he left and yet it seems years." And then in another tone she added, "Mr. Chilton left for New Zealand the same day."

The good doctor looked at her through his spectacles and she thought there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. "New Zealand? Indeed. A long journey, but I've heard it is a salubrious land. He will be gone for a long time, of course. One does not make one-day excursions to the antipodes." He did not pretend to regret the Honorable James.

"Miss Gordon has come to make a visit," Roslyn told him, thinking to herself that even the tolerant broad-minded doctor had no time for Mr. James Chilton. "She wants Mrs. Chilton to spend some time over in Clinton with her this winter——" She stopped, fearful of revealing too much.

"Yes? That will be nice," he said absently. "What I came over for, Miss Roslyn, is to tell you the good news. I've been talking to Brown to-day,—he is a big publisher, you know,—and he tells me that he will take the biography when it is finished. In fact, I have made tentative arrangements——"

"Father's biography?" cried Roslyn, with a great wave of joy flooding her whole being. "Oh, Dr. Briggs, how splendid! I can't tell you how glad I am."

At first, as he talked, she thought only of the happiness of knowing that her dear father, though dead, yet would speak to the world of the things he had found in the wild hearts of forgotten peoples. But, as Dr. Briggs spoke of advanced royalties and the percentage that would be allowed on sales, she realized that in her need, her father had reached out from the unseen world to bless her.

"Yes, it will be sure of a modest sale, Brown says, if not a tremendous success at first. It's the sort of thing that libraries and all learned people would buy," Dr. Briggs told her in great elation. "I had hoped only for a small affair; in fact, I went there to offer to pay half on the publication, but I never made my offer. As soon as Brown saw the papers,

he made the offer. Ah, it's a well-paid labor of love, after all."

He laughed at her reminder that there was a partnership between them.

"Why, I'm a rich man, young lady," he said. "I need a hobby badly. I really ought to pay you for letting me get the book in shape. It will take some months to get it ready to give to Brown, and I sha'n't hurry too much. It will be on the bookstands by August, I trust."

"Does it take so long as that to get out a book?" Roslyn was amazed. "I thought——"

He chuckled. "Most people do," he said, as he rose to go. "But books, like trees, take a long time to reach perfection. Well, I must trot along or my good housekeeper will be sending out the crier for me."

Roslyn went back to the music-room with her thoughts in a joyful tangle. She saw the book in store-windows,—*Myth and Religion in the Past,* with passers-by stopping to read the name of the author,—Henry Blake; and pride and delight and thankfulness bubbled within her. Beyond anything, she desired this memorial to her father. It was a miracle that had been wrought by loving-kindness. Dr. Briggs shone before her like some beneficent saint of old, and she blessed him almost with tears.

"He'll never know how much he's done for me," she murmured. "After while, when the book is done, I'll tell him what a blessing the money part of it is . . ."

The relief of knowing that she would have funds

to draw on later in the year was so great that she did not think of the long winter and spring and summer that must go by before she could receive the sorely needed means of living. When she did think of it, she laughed at it. Had she not the two treasures? The necklace in its sheath of ribbon was on her neck and the snuff-bottle was in the trunk.

She told them at the dinner-table and there was generous rejoicing by all. Muriel laughingly said that Miss Bump, with her girlish stories of hearts and darts, would have to take a back seat when *Myth and Religion* came out; Bob asked why in thunder he hadn't been allowed to see the papers,—he always liked that sort of thing; Mrs. Chilton brightened at once and ate a good meal for the first time since her illness. Miss Sarah was in high triumph.

"There," she exclaimed. "That will show *somebody* what sort of a man your dear father was. He was always hinting that Mr. Blake was no scientist. I'll send a copy to Aukland by special delivery the moment the books come off the press."

"Mr. Wong will be pleased," supplemented Muriel. "He thought the note-books perfectly wonderful. Have you heard when he is coming home, Mother?"

Mrs. Chilton shook her head. "He always sends Hop Kee on ahead to let me know," she said, absently. "Roslyn, my dear, did I tell you that Miss Bump is coming to tea to-morrow? She asked if she might, and I told her that we would be delighted. She made a point of us all being there.

Particularly Bob. She hinted that she had not seen him recently."

Bob looked up from his frozen custard. "All right," he agreed cheerfully. "I haven't seen so much of her since—since—well, lately. She sort of hauled me over the coals for not giving Verna Puff the gas-saver, you know. But I wasn't going to let that Miss Fred Binns get the benefit of it. She wanted to lend it to him, while he drove her about in his old painted-up bus."

"I should hope not!" cried Muriel indignantly. "Miss Bump ought to have better sense than to expect it."

"Oh, she's all right," Bob assured her through a spoonful of custard. "She tackled Verna about her fickleness, she told me, and she got an earful, she says. She's through with *her,* and I don't mind seeing her. Sure, I'll come in and lap up a bowl of tea, Mums. Have some muffins, do."

They were all in good spirits, even Mrs. Chilton, and the evening passed happily, with some music, a round of bridge, and a great deal of talk before the fire. Mrs. Chilton stopped Roslyn as she said good night. While Bob was engaged in a dispute with Muriel over a play she had made earlier in the evening, and Miss Sarah went out for her glass of malted milk, she found opportunity to tell her how much Dr. Briggs' good news meant to her.

"I can see that you get food and shelter, my dear, until the fall," she promised. "I really ought to do more for you, but since spring I have had so little chance to save. I think I should tell you that I

have received nothing from Mr. Chilton for your sustenance. I suppose he saved it to put it in this house," she added, generously.

Roslyn was about to confess in her turn that she had means of supplying her most pressing needs,—once she could dispose of them,—but Miss Sarah came back with her tumbler of milk and she merely thanked Mrs. Chilton with a look and a warm squeeze of the hand.

Muriel left her discussion and came running upstairs after her. She was in high spirits, quite like her old happy unaffected self. She did not refer to her father's heartless conduct except just as she was about to turn off her light. She stood in the doorway in her dainty pink robe, with her fair hair shining like an aureole about her head, and Roslyn thought she had never seen her look so buoyant.

"Isn't it lovely to be able to act just as one wants?" she laughed. "I feel as if I had been let out of prison. I know that sounds horrid," she added more seriously, "and as if one were forgetting the Fourth Commandment, but he has never really been a father to us. He hates everyone and everything that interfered with his comfort or his ideas. Look how he treated Bob. If I'd had a father like yours . . ."

Roslyn could say nothing, for it was only too true. Muriel's loving heart would have glorified even a less tender father than Henry Blake had been.

Muriel dismissed the subject with a wave of her hair-brush. "Now I sha'n't have to be ashamed of showing that I like Mr. Wong," she said with can-

dor. "And I do like him, Rosie, for he's the nicest man I've ever met. And I think he likes me. When he looks at me with those piercing eyes of his, I feel it all through me."

Roslyn thought in panic, "Goodness, is she going to tell me that she's in love with him?" Aloud, she tried to put Muriel's confession of liking on a basis of friendship.

"Of course, you like him," she laughed. "We all do. I am afraid I'm going to lose my heart to him, if we go to that concert over at Windham."

"That concert was my idea," Muriel told her, a trifle crisply. "I thought it would put Father off the track and I suggested it to him. You needn't go now, unless you're set on it. You don't care anything for him, I know."

She was actually trembling. Roslyn could see the lace on her robe quiver. The sight of her agitation broke down the resolution to keep silent and the words rushed out of themselves. "But he's got a wife in China. I saw a letter to her. He's sent for her to come here."

She said more than she ought, she realized that the moment the words were out of her mouth. Muriel's hand dropped to her side and the hairbrush fell on the floor. She stared at Roslyn for a moment and then, without a word, she went quickly into her room and shut and locked the door. Not a syllable would she answer to all of Roslyn's remorseful entreaties.

"I've done it now, rushing it out like that,"

thought poor Roslyn as she gave up at last. "And I meant to be so diplomatic and so kind!"

She could not think of going to bed. Perhaps Muriel would soften after a while. She sat down to read by the desk but she was too restless to sit still. She roamed about, trying to be patient and resourceful. If she waited an hour, Muriel might listen to her. She would go up to her own room and fuss about a bit and then come back.

She tried once again before she left. She whispered at the door-panel, "I'm going upstairs, Mew dear. I'll be down soon. Don't shut me out all night."

There was no response and she sighed as she turned away. An hour would hardly be enough. She turned off the light and went upstairs. The house was very still as she tiptoed up the steps and Bob's gentle snores could be clearly heard as she passed his door. It was pleasant to think of him in there, free from the daily naggings and faultfinding that he had borne so patiently. And with Hop Kee gone, she felt that she, too, was released. "It's another house," she thought. "I feel as if I'd never want to go to bed. I'd like to roam around all night."

Her own room was too small for her restlessness, and she decided to get a book from the sitting-room shelves. She left her light burning and crept downstairs to the upper hall. The closed door reminded her that Miss Sarah was a careful, even timid person who might wake and be alarmed. So she went on down to the hall, with her ear strained to catch

the sound of any movement above. They were all asleep, except Muriel who was immersed in her own emotions, and she grew bolder as she moved about. The curtains of the side window were not drawn and through the panes she saw the yellow slice of the old moon clear and bright behind the eastern hills. It beckoned her with its golden horn as it spilled its radiance over the valley and hills.

"Come out and be free and happy," it seemed to say. "All the dark things have fled. Hop Kee has gone, the snakes are gone; the stars and I are waiting."

She took her heavy sweater and her fur-lined boots and then stopped to listen. All was quiet above. She went softly through the back-hall and undid the bolt on the kitchen-door. The stars seemed to sparkle brighter as she came out; Orion marching up over the heavens as if to bar the progress of the rising moon, Vega like a lamp overhead, and all the hosts of little unknown stars that had cheered her many a time before: they seemed to dance with happiness now, as if they, too, had just come out for a scamper through the freedom of the skies.

"I'll go as far as the barn-lane and then I'll come back," she thought.

The crisp air filled her lungs with the breath of the hills; the pure peaceful light of the moon showed the country she had come to love so well at its peaceful best. It seemed to hold out its arms to her and she went, smiling, into its welcoming levels. She chose the familiar rutted lane, because

it was bathed with light. She could see the color of the frosted grass and the tiny sparkling diamonds on the dead weeds.

A sudden whim took her as she reached the open field by the graveyard. "Mew's angel will look lovely in the moonlight," she thought. "I'll go in and take a look. She'll have to listen when I go back and tell her where I've been."

She found the tomb behind the juniper tree and the angel sitting on it with upraised hand, as if in salute to the starry hosts. It was more beautiful than it could have been in daylight and she stood looking at it with wide, dreamy eyes. Life and death . . . the vanished human being beneath the stone and the imperishable figure above it . . . these things were——

Was it a snake in the grass? No, it was the wind. It was rising and it had changed since dinner. It blew from the east now. She took another look at the angel, because it was too beautiful to leave. Muriel had been right about it. It was——

"Oh!" she gasped.

The moon and the stars went out and her cry died in her throat. A dark cloth had been flung over her head, and her two wrists were grasped as in a vise. Then she felt herself drawn backward, turned and pressed against something cold and hard. The cloth across her face tightened so that breathing was difficult. She could not make a sound.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WHEEL OF THINGS TURNS AGAIN

THE cloth was slipped down from her eyes and became a closer gag across her mouth. She felt that she was being bound from behind by strong bands to the stone angel on the tomb. Her heart pounded in her throat, deafening her, as she saw the dark face of Hop Kee smiling at her when the bent figure straightened from its task of securing the knots.

"Nicee moon," he said, as if he expected a casual comment on the weather from his victim. "You no cold. You got big plenty much warm coat."

She was amazed at his coolness. What did he mean by such effrontery? What was he going to do with her? She remembered the Chinese methods of slow torture for prisoners and made a convulsive movement with her bound arms.

He glided closer to her and brought a knife from his sleeve. "Missee keep still, like mices. Hop Kee velly good bloy."

She understood that if she remained passive he would do her no harm at present, and she let herself relax against the hard marble. He grinned as he saw that she had caught his meaning.

"Missee hol' velly kliet now," he advised. "Hop Kee velly good bloy. No hurt Missee."

She felt his cold yellow hands upon her throat and involuntarily she shrank away. The angel's arms

were about her in a chilly embrace, blocking her retreat. Hop Kee's yellow fingers began to grope into the collar of her dress, while he kept up the murmuring sing-song, "Hop Kee velly good bloy. Missee all lightee with Hop Kee."

Suddenly she knew what he was after, and she kept very still.

He had it in his hands and was holding it close to his eyes and she saw it in the moonlight, glistening like twisted sea-foam in the silvery glow. Her jade necklace, her precious jade necklace!

He stowed it in an inner pocket and then stooped till his ugly face was close to her own.

"Lememmy, Hop Kee velly good bloy," he insisted. "He go now, chop chop. You stay. No cly. No walk. Seven day makee talk. Tellee Misty Wong."

He went swiftly away, around the juniper tree toward the western end of the graveyard. She tried to make a move, to cry out but was helpless. Her slight movement arrested him, and he came back. He had his knife in his hand.

"No cly. No walk," he said savagely. "Hop Kee takee shain where him blong. Blong China way. No blong Mellican way."

She stared at him with unblinking eyes and he laid the knife down on the tomb just out of reach; a curious act on his part.

"No tell on Hop Kee or Misty Wong get hurt mebbe-so," he threatened. "And mebbe-so Missee Mlury cly, too. Seven day allee light talkee."

He disappeared then, leaving her thoroughly

frightened. It was plain that he would go to any length to keep the necklace. She sat without a motion, fearing that he might return in worse mood. The valley lay silent in the moonlight and the only sound was the breeze in the dead weeds beside the tomb. Hop Kee had vanished as noiselessly as he had come.

The midnight train crawled along the distant rim of the valley, its line of lighted windows like a string of tiny beads. To her surprise it halted at the flag station. Someone was getting on. Hop Kee?

The thought gave her courage. She worked at the bonds with all her might. The cloth did not stretch much and it was tied securely, but after a long time she managed to work the gag from her mouth, and draw in a deep breath of air. It gave her strength to renew the struggle and after another weary battle, the cloth that bound her wrists loosened enough for her fingers to touch the hilt of the knife.

Little by little she drew it to her and with infinite labor, she got it in her stiffened fingers. She cut her wrist slightly but the cloth gave way at last, and her left hand was free. After that, it was easy to cut the rest of her bonds. She sat still then, in a panic lest Hop Kee return.

"He may be watching me," she thought, and glanced about in every direction. She saw him behind the juniper tree, in the grass behind the row of ancient grave-stones, on the walk between the tombs: everywhere she looked the sinister form of the Chinaman lurked and peered. The cold breath

of the night wind on her neck was not wind but his yellow groping fingers.

She had to sit there for a time to collect herself. She knew that it was impossible for any human being to be in so many places at once: yet she dreaded the moment when she must rise and try to make her way across the fields to the house. The lane was so entirely visible in the clear soft light that she would be seen from any hiding-place where the Chinaman might be lurking,—if he had not gone on the train.

She hung her hope on that,—that he had been the passenger who had flagged the train. And presently, as nothing happened, she rose stiffly and took a step. The breeze rustled the weeds but nothing else moved. Then, as she began to go slowly toward the walk, her mind began to work more clearly. She went back and got the cloth that had bound her, and folded it neatly. It was easily hidden inside her sweater. She saw the knife and picked it up. Its touch gave her courage.

The lane was endlessly long but she left it at last. As she came up the rough track behind the barns, someone came out of the shadow. "My lands alive!" Gladys cried under her breath. "If you ain't the beatinest! Walkin' out like it was noonday, and me all in a trimble about you."

Roslyn walked steadily on. She did not trust herself to speak.

"I seen your light up there," Gladys went on, falling into step. "And thinks I, 'It's funny she's up so late.' So I put on my clothes and went up

to see if you was sick or somepin. I knocked soft and whispered, but not a peep could I get out of you. So I tried the door, and you was gone. Lands! you did give me a turn. I was just goin' to wake up Mr. Bob when I see you strollin' along like a picnic party in June."

"You're awfully good," Roslyn managed to say. She was afraid her voice might betray her but Gladys chattered cheerfully on, in a lower and lower tone as they neared the house.

They parted in the lower hall and Roslyn climbed the stairs wearily. Her feet felt as if made of lead. The same peaceful silence enfolded the house, and Bob's regular breathing was going on as before. Her adventure seemed like a dream, a nightmare from which she had just awakened. The piece of cloth under her arm, the knife and the empty ribbon where the necklace had lain were the only evidences of the weird reality.

She went to her room to turn off the light which was still burning, and some impulse prompted her to have a look at the snuff-bottle. She must make sure of the one source of income that was left. She knew it before she opened the bundle of cotton and brocade wrappers. It was gone.

She sat down in the desk-chair and stared stupidly at the photograph in the beaten-silver frame. She felt as if she ought to offer excuses to her father for her carelessness but she was too tired. Everything seemed flat and stale in the reaction from that hour in the arms of the angel. "It doesn't matter," she murmured, listlessly. "Nothing matters."

She flung herself just as she was, fur boots and all, on the couch and pulled up the silk coverlid. No use to go downstairs, to keep Muriel company. Muriel was angry at her. Hop Kee was gone, anyway. Gone. Gone never to return. "That's one good thing," she thought. "I shouldn't want to see even Ling Loo after this. . . . I hope Mr. Wong——"

The name brought her up with a turn. She jumped from the couch and walked about, trying to piece together the scraps of evidence that had puzzled her recently. Mr. Wong had sent a cablegram in cipher to his wife in the Sun-Ping province, asking her to come to America,—that was the first fact. She had found her box in his room, hidden under papers, some days after it had been stolen,—was he implicated in the theft? Why did Mr. Han leave so abruptly, after telling Dr. Briggs that he would help him with the biography which he knew to be a prolonged labor? Why had Hop Kee stolen the necklace and the snuff-bottle and run away to China, binding her to silence for seven days?

"He could easily be arrested right there on the ship," she thought. "They'd send out descriptions of him at once. Seven days start is not much on a journey like that. And why did he say I could tell Mr. Wong when the seven days was up?"

It was too much of a tangle for her and she gave it up. Nevertheless, the questions buzzed in her head, so that she could not sleep. When the first streak of pale light showed over the eastern hills she got up and washed and put on fresh clothes,

lingering over the process, but she could not fill the time until the usual rising hour. A sudden fear sent her to the kitchen, where she found Gladys grinding the coffee.

"Don't say anything about my marauding about last night, Gladys," she said, as gaily as she could. "I promise you I won't do it again." She added, more seriously, "I'm afraid Mrs. Chilton would worry for fear I might get the habit."

"Lands, no, I wouldn't peep a word," Gladys smiled back at her. "I know how it is with the old folks,—they're always on edge lest we ketch cold or somepin. I guess you're right about not walkin' out after midnight, though. I heard of a lady over to Jonesville who ran into a band of bootleggers that way, and they scared her somepin fierce,—she never got over it, she told Mom."

As she stood on the back-porch looking out over the smiling, frosty countryside, Bob came whistling up the barn-lane. "Hello, Rosie," he cried. "You're another early bird. I bet you haven't got the cinch on a worm like I found this morning."

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"Over to see Lincoln Mutz," he replied hilariously. "And I've been elected chief assistant in the surgical department, with the privilege of administering gas to the out-patients."

"You mean that you've hired yourself to the garage?" she inquired with a pang. "Your mother won't like that."

"My child, there are lots of things on this mundane sphere that do not intrigue the delicate female

taste," he returned laughing. "I'll pull down twenty good berries per week, and that answers all complaints, I should fancy."

Roslyn would not smile, though he teased her to approve his move. She felt helpless before the turn that things had taken; an unusual feeling for her. Until lately she had been able to bring a brave spirit to the hardest problem.

When she heard Muriel's door close, she waited at the foot of the stairs to catch the first sight of her as she descended. Muriel smiled down on her, a wan little smile, and blew her a kiss. She had on her outdoor wraps and she carried a letter in her hand.

"I'm going to run over to the village to post this," she said hastily. "I'll have time to get it in the early mail if I hurry."

Roslyn looked after her with a sinking heart. "She did not want to kiss me," she thought. "She doesn't care for me any more. I bungled it last night."

The thought bit into her mind and left a sore spot. Gentle Muriel had never treated her coldly before. When she saw her coming back half an hour later, she went out on the porch to meet her.

"Don't be cross with me, Mew," she began. "I——"

"I'm not cross," replied Muriel evenly. "Please don't apologize. I am only too glad to know what you told me."

She passed indoors, though, without waiting for Roslyn and went immediately into the dining-room

where her mother and Bob were already seated at the table. She smiled down at her mother as she bent to kiss her.

"Here are two letters for you, Mums," she said brightly. "And,—what do you think?—I've made up my mind to go in with Evelyn Harper. I've always wanted to fuss around a shop,—you remember how I loved to play store when I was a youngster. Evelyn's shop will be such fun."

Miss Sarah came in as she spoke and, to Roslyn's surprise, she approved most heartily. "Let her go, by all means, my dear Margaret," she advised. "It will be an amusing experience for her, and it is a position that many ladies find interesting nowadays. Our cousin, Lady Mary Diggs, is making out marvellously in her hat-shop in Boston, she writes me."

Mrs. Chilton sighed. "Of course, I will not forbid you, Muriel," she said. "But we really could manage on the sum I shall have. If——"

"Tut, tut, let the child have her way," interposed Miss Sarah. "You will be glad of a change, Muriel, I know, and with Robert Allyngham away——"

"But I'm not going away to that Henderson Shop," Bob spoke up. "I've landed a job right here at home," and he went into details.

His mother seemed overcome by the rapid march of events but her sister was not affected in the same way. She spoke with decision.

"Robert Allyngham, you may as well march over to that Mutz person and hand in your resignation," she said with the emphasis of authority. "We may

not be able to send you to Harvard,—and you don't admire the law, I've been told,—but you shall not waste your talents in a village garage. You shall go to Lehigh University, if you care to. The engineering course there is highly thought of, I understand. I fancy I have some rights over my own sister's children, now that I am allowed to express my feelings."

Roslyn could have fallen on her neck and poured out her gratitude, but she was too tired to do more than add a few words to the outburst of appreciation of Miss Sarah's generous offer. Bob was the most serious one of them all. He was plainly much delighted with the prospect of the University, but he made stipulations.

"I'll be glad to go, Aunt Sarah," he said, "and it's awfully decent of you to say I shall take the whole course, but it's got to be understood that I shall work in vacations, so I can pay you back. I couldn't accept on any other terms."

Roslyn was afraid Miss Gordon might resent so independent an attitude but that lady appeared more pleased than ever. She nodded her head as if to some invisible person.

"Now tell me that boy is not a Gordon through and through," she exclaimed in triumph. "Robert Allyngham, I should blush for you if you had not offered some recompense. It is the best investment I ever made,—to know that you have the Gordon backbone. We must go over to the University with him at once, Margaret. There is no time to be lost. Is your automobile in condition, Bob? We

should prefer to drive, rather than employ the more tedious railroad."

Muriel followed Roslyn to the music-room. "Did you hear that?" she inquired. "She called him Bob. She's never done that before." Then, in a lower tone, she said, "Don't think I'm cross, Roslyn. I was angry and hurt last night because I thought you were unkind. But now I see how bad you feel about it,—you hardly ate any breakfast, and you look like a ghost,—I wish I hadn't been so nippy."

Roslyn put an arm about her and she nestled close as she whispered, "Help me get away to Helen's to-day. I really can't stand meeting Mr Wong after this, and he may come home at any hour."

Roslyn promised. It made her most uncomfortable to be unable to explain the real reason for her haggard looks. There was no help for it, however. She promised herself when the seven days were up she would tell Muriel all about her midnight adventure as soon as she had spoken to Mr. Wong. He might advise secrecy so far as the others were concerned but she was determined that Muriel should not be shut out from her confidence, once the hour arrived.

"Now that's settled," Muriel murmured. "We'll wait till they've started for Bethlehem and then I'll pack, and you can call up the station bus. I'll take the first train I can catch." She patted Roslyn's cheek as she added, "You ought to go up and take a nap, though, for you look half dead for sleep.

After all, we have plenty of time. Mr. Wong always sends Hop Kee along ahead of him. Hop Kee hasn't come back yet, has he? "

Roslyn shook her head. "No," she replied, "he hasn't come back yet. And I'm pretty sure he won't be here to-day." Muriel's startled look made her add, hastily, "He told me when he left that he was going to be gone a long while." And then, as Muriel still looked puzzled, "I happened to be outside when—when he came back for something he'd left."

Muriel appeared satisfied that Roslyn had not been getting her information from Hop Kee's master. "I'd be glad if he never came back," she remarked as she began to gather up her hat and coat from the hall-settle where she had flung them. "That's one thing that I could not understand about them—how they could have such a grisly creature about them."

Roslyn sighed as she turned to the window. She heard Muriel's light footsteps move about the hall and up the stair. "She won't mention his name, and that's a bad sign for her to be so afraid to speak his name. She's in love with him . . . what a mess it all is! "

The morning dragged on. Bob drove off with the two ladies in his reformed chariot and Muriel packed her bags in time for the noon train. Roslyn went to the station with her, and walked home for the sake of being out in the fine, sparking air. She came in the drive just as the baker was delivering Miss Bump's bread, and the sight of the brown loaves reminded her of the afternoon engagement. In their

excitement, they had all forgotten that Miss Bump had invited herself to tea this very afternoon.

"I'll have to tell her they are all out," she thought. "She's kind and reasonable, and she'll understand."

Miss Bump, however, was inclined to be slightly sharp in her disappointment, and Roslyn went farther than she intended. "They decided rather suddenly to take Bob over to enroll at Lehigh, and Muriel has gone off to the city,—a friend of hers is opening a shop and she had to go at once," she told her.

"I see," replied the authoress in a chilly tone, "that it must be a pleasure postponed. Unfortunately, I am compelled to run away for a few days. When I return I shall 'phone to Mrs. Chilton. I shall set a time when they are sure to be at home. Good-bye."

Roslyn hung up, feeling that she had been snubbed. Miss Bump's voice had been more than chilly as she said that *good-bye*. She wandered about the empty house for a while and then decided to finish sorting her music. She was busy with it when Gladys called her to lunch.

"My land of Goshen, ain't the house shivery with 'em all away?" Gladys remarked sociably as she set the rolls on the table. "I s'pose you'll be goin' next. My, if I could play like you, I'd get some swell job in a movie up to town. It 'ud be fine to set and play and see all the grand fillums I wanted, *free*."

A door seemed to open to Roslyn. "Do you know

anyone who'd like to take music-lessons? " she heard herself say. " If I stay here, I'll have more time on my hands now and I could take a few scholars." She felt like a traitor to Capponi as she said, for she virtually promised him that she would not interrupt her own work. Music-teachers, Capponi held, degenerated into mere machines; no one, save those without talent or those past their prime, should engage in giving lessons.

Gladys stood by the table, breathing hard as was her custom when thinking. Her face brightened, then, as she cried, " Sure I do. Cora Hopkins was astin' on'y last week if I thought you'd learn her to play two-steps. She's got a pi-anno that her aunt ust to have before she broke up and she wants to give parties this winter. I told her you were too tony for teachin' two-steps, but I can fetch her over this afternoon if you like. She's not the sort to take offense."

Roslyn explained that there would have to be more than one pupil for her to begin with. " If there were three who wanted lessons, I'd start in at once," she said. " Don't bother, though, until I make up my mind about it. I may not do it, after all."

Gladys looked at her from under her long lashes. " Well," was all she said.

It was about an hour later that she came to Roslyn, who was reading in the little sitting-room. " Here's a telegram for His Lordship," she said. " You better sign for it, I guess. Jim says it's full of gibberish. He heard his pop takin' it over the

wire. Jim's a smart one, I tell you. He's learned all them rackety sounds by heart, he says."

Roslyn hesitated. "I don't know——" she began.

"Well, he's bound to be back soon, ain't he?" demanded Gladys. "He sayd for to take in his mail and all that. Jim'll on'y have to make another trip," and while Roslyn was signing for the telegram she added, "Jim says there's queer words in that letter . . . 'Arrive Constantinople,' and 'deplore eternity.' I told him he was crazy but he sticks to it. It's from China, he says."

Roslyn took it from her with a little shiver of repugnance. To her it was a link in the chain of evidence against Mr. Wong, whether it came, as she dreaded, from Hop Kee, or from the absent wife. "Don't be silly," she said sharply. "Jim oughtn't to babble about what he hears at the office."

"My lands, you've got a chill all right, walkin' out in the night air," remarked Gladys with concern. "You ought to take a cup of camomile tea and wrap up in your bed."

After she had hurried away with the book and money for the cablegram, Roslyn looked at the yellow envelope. What did it contain?

"If it came from China, it can't be from Mr. Han or Hop Kee," she told herself. "It might be from Mrs. Wong. It must be, for it's written in cipher. Jim thought it nonsense, but each of those words means a whole sentence, I suppose. I wonder when Mr. Wong will be back. I'd like to see his face when he gets it."

She wavered between two courses and then said aloud, "I'll give it to him myself. It's lucky I was here to receive it. I'll watch him very closely and perhaps he'll say something . . ."

She added, as she put the envelope into the desk, "It isn't possible he's gone, too. No, I won't believe he had anything to do with it. Hop Kee said to tell him . . ."

CHAPTER XX

THE TOP OF FORTUNE HILL

THE lake lay, a serene irregular oval, reflecting the long somber russet-and-green curve of Fortune Hill. All was dim and dewy save at the upper end where the silver-gold of the November sunrise began to pour through the notch in the bare tree-tops at the place where the ground dipped almost to the level of the water. Only one bird was calling. All else was silent, as if wrapped in a dream of the glory that had passed.

Roslyn had fled to the dim wooded summit of Fortune Hill, driven by a night of troubled broken sleep. Out here among the sweet sharp odors of the friendly hillsides she sought shelter from her own weakness. She had come through the glow of the rising sun up the slope into the green temple of the pines and found there, among their dimness, the lake, with its lone bird calling, calling.

"It's like the lake up among the Annam hills," she thought, and she sat down on a fallen log to watch the drifting leaves as they spiralled on through the quiet air to rest on the surface of the water.

As the light quickened around her and the sunshine touched the dark pines with gold, her face reflected the brighter hues about her. This climb to

the summit of Fortune Hill had been the final test of her courage, and she knew she had won the battle which she had waged more or less successfully during the last five days.

At first, she had been haunted by the fear of Hop Kee in every lurking shadow; she had seen him in the dark corners of the stair as she went to bed at night; she had heard the low whistle of his summons to Ling Loo when it was only the November wind rising under the eaves; she had dreaded the lanes and fields where once she had been so free; but, gradually, she had gained a hold on herself and had taken this early morning walk as the last test of her recovered nerve. She could go down now, with the strength of the eternal hills in her veins. She had conquered fear.

"I've got to remember that nothing is impossible," she said, half aloud. "I'll have to find a way to live; for I won't hamper Mrs. Chilton. She has enough to bear. I'll get some music-scholars and make out somehow until Mr. Laird comes back. But I won't give up my music, no matter what Miss Sarah says."

She went down the wood-track among the fallen leaves, feeling strong and calm again. She knew her father would approve her course, and she felt as if he were supporting her decision. When she entered the dining-room the two ladies were already seated at the table. Miss Sarah looked up from her mail with a welcoming smile.

"Ah, you have come in at last," she said. "We have letters, my dear. Bob has written us both.

He is very happy in his new quarters, and says he is doing well with the examinations. And we have been talking, my sister Margaret and I, of what we have discussed before. It is finally decided—we are all to go to Clinton for the winter."

Roslyn tried to speak but she raised her delicate hand.

"No, my dear, do not protest. There is no other course." She turned to Mrs. Chilton. "This enormous mansion with its lawns and out-buildings is a white elephant on your hands, as I said the moment I stepped over the door-sill. Roslyn may be able to rent it. Or even sell it. That remains to be seen. But you will not have to buy any more coal for it, and that ought to be a consideration. When you come over to Clinton,—both of you, I mean,—I am sure you will enjoy the change. The society there is extremely refined and elegant."

All this had been discussed the night before, when Roslyn had been compelled to acquiesce for the moment; she could not bear to give more pain to dear Mrs. Chilton, who had been upset by Muriel's abrupt departure. All through the night, however, she had waked with a feeling that she had committed herself to something she could not carry out. Miss Sarah had no piano, and she looked on Roslyn's devotion to her music as a passing fancy, natural enough but destined to give place to other fancies.

"Young ladies always spend so much time on music and painting and then, after they marry, they forget it entirely," she said, when Mrs. Chilton, for

the hundredth time, reminded her of Roslyn's work. "She will have the best society in Clinton and there are some nice young men there, too, who will do their best to keep the time from hanging heavy on her hands. I used to paint on velvet a great deal myself, when I was a girl."

The strength that Roslyn had found at the top of Fortune Hill made her speak with the ring of conviction in her voice. "It is lovely of you to ask me, and I know I should have a good time but I have to keep on with my music. I can get a few scholars here, I think, and if the house is closed before Mr. Laird returns, I can board with Mrs. Clunk for almost nothing. Gladys said her mother would be glad to have me in the house,—she's going to the city, Gladys, I mean, to get a job ——"

"I know all about that silly Gladys and her nonsense," interrupted Miss Sarah, flushing. "I must say, Roslyn, that I am surprised that you should prefer the society of the Clunk person to a refined home among cultured people. I suppose that you must do as you please, since my sister does not appear to have any authority over you."

Mrs. Chilton laid a hand on Roslyn's. "I believe she is right, Sally," she said gently. "She will have something to fill her life if other things fail. Something beautiful and enduring. I should be afraid to forbid her to follow her bent."

Miss Sarah sniffed. "You have always been too meek," she remarked drily. "But let it be as she chooses. I should not want to force my hospitality on anyone, I am sure. There is the telephone ring-

ing. I suppose it is Muriel again. The dear girl has certainly kept you informed of herself . . ."

"Will you see who it is, Roslyn?" asked Mrs. Chilton pouring another cup of weak tea for her sister. "It can hardly be Muriel at this hour."

As Roslyn went to the back-hall she heard a murmur of remonstrance and a low but determined counter-fire from Miss Sarah. "Oh, dear," she thought. "I didn't think she'd feel that way about it. But I can't go to Clinton. It wouldn't be right."

It was Miss Bump once again on the wire. She asked for Mrs. Chilton and her voice was filled with that mysterious suggestion which had thrilled Roslyn on former occasions. It did not excite her now; she was used to the authoress' theatrical effects, and she went to call Mrs. Chilton without lingering, or seeking to delay.

"Miss Bump is coming to tea to-day," she told Miss Sarah as Mrs. Chilton left the room. "Shall you be in, Miss Sarah? She wants us all, she said last week. She seemed put out to find that Bob and Muriel had gone . . ."

"I shall be here," returned Miss Sarah loftily. "I do not take pleasure in flouting the wishes of my friends and relatives."

She took up the morning paper and began to scan the headlines. Roslyn watched her sitting there in her dainty morning-robe with her beautifully-kept hands holding the newspaper, and she thought, "She is very kind, and very aristocratic. But she would be hard for me to live with. She looks down on

professional musicians, and I am going to be a musician. In spite of everything, I *will*."

Miss Bump set the hour; three o'clock. She chose to come early, she told Mrs. Chilton over the wire, because there would be much to talk about. "I suppose she will tell us all about her trip to Boston," said Mrs. Chilton. "She can be most entertaining. You will like her, Sally. Her books are not at all modern; just sweet love-stories that come out happily in the end."

Miss Sarah began a recital of the famous authors she had known and Roslyn escaped after a reasonable period. She had heard a good deal of these same people in the six days of Miss Gordon's stay at Belleview, and she had some mending that was crying out for the needle.

As she passed the door of Muriel's room a fleeting memory of the first day in Belleview came to her. She saw Muriel with the laughing light in her eyes, choose the tower-chamber for her own and heard her say, "I can imagine I'm an enchanted princess." Poor Mew, her castle had fallen about her ears and the prince had turned out to be a dragon. The *Style Shop* was hardly a place where dreams would come true.

Gladys came up to her room later in the morning. She had a letter and some gossip, each of which she delivered with great relish.

"That's from Mr. Han," she said, as she gave the envelope to Roslyn. "The Missus had one, too, and she told me he was takin' it easy on the way to his home. Seein' America first. he is. Mind you,

he's on'y got as far as Cleveland, Ohio. He found friends there, she told me. Where's your letter from? The postmark's kinda blurry."

She waited until Roslyn had read the short note and her interest was so genuine and so kindly that Roslyn had not the heart to be too reticent. Mr. Han had discovered some ancient manuscripts on Oriental art in the private collection of one of Cleveland's connoisseurs and had been unable to tear himself away. "I shall take up my journey in a day or so," he wrote. "I am sending you by separate mail a copy of Krantz's *Melody in F Minor*. It will be a memory of me when the mists of oblivion have erased my image from the clear mirror of your mind. I shall have entered on the Eight-fold Path of peace while you will yet be making melody like this of my illustrious friend Krantz."

"Gosh, that's fine, ain't it?" Gladys exclaimed. "I always liked him a whole lot. Mr. Wong, too, is a fine man. I'll be glad to see him back, if on'y that nasty Hop Kee didn't have to come, too. Do you know, I kinda got over despisin' him as I did at first off? He had a lot of nice ways about him, when I come to know him better. But, after that, I got scary about his trackin' about after you. Thank goodness, he's been off for so long. Maybe he won't be back before we pack up."

She kept the gossip for the last moment before she left the room, as Roslyn told her that Miss Bump would be there for tea that afternoon.

"Miss Bump's young man is the fellow that Mayme Todd's goin' to hook up with on Thanks-

givin'," she said. "And he told Mayme and she told Mom and Mom told me when I was in there just now that Mr. Wong had bought a lot of shares in the silk-stocking mill and was goin' to settle down here for keeps. Hopkins was tellin' Mom that he heard old Walker, the president, hintin' that he'd have a son-in-law soon. Say, don't folks make you tired, talkin' about other folks like they do?"

Roslyn sat looking out her window after Gladys had left: the dark crest of Fortune Hill reared itself against the clear sky, no longer an unknown land. She had climbed its summit alone and found, not fortune, but simple everyday endurance to fortify her for the future. She laughed a little ruefully as she thought of her high hopes when she had looked ahead to the day when she should explore its lonely crest.

Nothing wonderful had come to her; Hop Kee had stolen the two things on which so much of the future was based; the cablegram to Mr. Wong still lay in the desk in the sitting-room where Mrs. Chilton had decided to leave it until delivery. What would be the outcome of it all? She took up the stocking that she had been darning and set to work again. Whatever came she would meet it with courage. She had endured the loss of her treasures and the disappointment about the operetta and had set her face valiantly toward the goal in spite of all, and there should be no turning back.

"Mr. Wong must explain about that box in his room, though," she thought, with a line of determination between her straight dark brows. "I must

ask him, and I suppose I'll have to tell him what I overheard."

Miss Bump came over at three in a light fall of snow that melted as it fell. She was sparkling all over with its powdery whiteness as she reached the porch. She shook off the crystals with a laugh.

"I'm like a veritable Christmas tree," she said, joyously. "My dear Ros—Miss Blake, you look like a rose in June. No, let me shake myself. I can't be tracking up your nice shiny hall floor. Where are they? Oh, I see, in the reception-room. That is good. We can be more private there. In case of callers."

She chattered on in the same excited way as she took off her wraps and joined the two ladies before the fire in the ante-room. Roslyn wondered if she ever got tired of making up these mysteries, but she could not help admiring and liking her more than ever, in spite of her whimsical ways. Miss Bump fairly shone with good-will and loving-kindness, though she was also nervous and absent and laughed at the wrong time more than once.

After Gladys had brought the tray and gone, she broke out, in her more frank and candid manner. "I simply can't swallow a drop of tea until I unburden myself. I must disclose my secret at last."

Miss Sarah looked astonished but Mrs. Chilton smiled serenely at her. "Pray do, my dear Miss Bump," she said with interest. "I did not know that you were burdened with a secret but if it will relieve you, we shall all be glad to hear it."

"I have a friend," Miss Bump appeared to be tell-

ing her news to Roslyn alone. "A friend who understands music. It was difficult to get him to come down to this benighted spot. He failed me on one occasion,—the Monday when the Countess surprised me by her arrival. But after she had been here she joined her entreaties and he came." She turned to Mrs. Chilton. "Miss Blake played before him. I arranged it——"

"I?" the words burst from Roslyn involuntarily. "I never played for anyone except the Countess and she——" She stopped ashamed of her rudeness. "Please forgive me, and go on, Miss Bump," she murmured, thinking to herself that the authoress must be a little mad. She had never played for any man in Miss Bump's house . . . then—

"It wasn't . . . it couldn't have been the electric man!" she cried.

Miss Bump stared at her through the glasses she had put on. She was fumbling in her bag for a paper which she brought out. "The electric man?" she inquired blankly, then as light broke in on her, she clapped her hands in delight. "How delicious!" she cried. "I must tell Konrad. He'll simply adore that; to be taken for an electrician. Yes, we talked of pumps and such things but, oh, that you should have so mistaken him!"

"Konrad!" It was Roslyn's turn to be astounded. "Was that *Konrad?*" She simply could not take it in. "Konrad, the conductor of the Harmonic Orchestra."

Miss Bump picked up the paper which had fallen to the floor. "Who else?" she demanded briskly.

"Konrad it was, and see, here is his letter. I shall read it, Mrs. Chilton, and you shall hear what he says, since our young lady is skeptical."

She cleared her throat and began, "Dear Bunny," broke off to explain the name as a childish memory when they had lived next door in Pittsburgh, and then went on again. Roslyn could hardly believe what she heard. Konrad advised a year of training at the Conservatory in Boston,—he would secure a scholarship,—after which, if all went well, he could assure Roslyn of small concert engagements!

"He doesn't usually allow a young person to begin to play before the public so soon," Miss Bump assured them with triumph, "but he says under the circumstances,—Miss Blake without a father and having such strength of character and experience and all that,—she would be ready earlier than most. What do you say, Miss Roslyn? Are you willing to go to Boston?"

Roslyn could barely find voice. "I'd go on my hands and knees," she said fervidly. "Oh, Miss Bump, how can I ever thank you? It's too—too——" She could not go on.

Miss Sarah saved her from utter breakdown. "There, what did I tell you, Margaret? If a person is going to be an artist, nothing can stop them. Even if she had come to Clinton . . . what is to be, will be."

Mrs. Chilton's silvery ripple softened her exclamation,—"Thank heaven, she has found her right place." Then she added with feeling, "Roslyn, my dear child, I am enchanted for you. Dear Miss

Bump, you have laid us all under an obligation we can never repay, for you have done what we could not do; set her in the straight path. I have no words to thank you."

"Mercy, what a pother about nothing!" cried Miss Bump, though her eyes were moist. "It was a mere bit of play-acting on my part. I took a chance. Nothing might have come of it. Konrad might have turned up his nose at her. I'm really no judge, you know ——"

She broke off to stare. Gladys had appeared suddenly at the curtained doorway and the expression on her cherubic countenance was alarming. She struggled to get her breath, and then burst out in a rush of frightened syllables.

"Oh, Mis' Chilton! Oh, Miss Roselind! Mr. Wong's come home unbeknownst-like and he's gone crazy up in his room. He howlin' for Hop Kee to bring back his heart."

They all sprang up. Mrs. Chilton took a step forward, but Miss Sarah glided behind the tea-table as the safest spot. Roslyn came out of her trance of delight.

"What do you mean?" they all cried in chorus.

"It's gospel truth," affirmed Gladys, pallid to the ear-tips. "He musta come in the side door, for his car is standin' out by the barns. The first thing I know of his bein' home was when I heerd him crying out for his heart. Shall I call the constable, Mis' Chilton? He's the nearest ——"

Mrs. Chilton moved to the door. "Come, Roslyn," she said, quietly. "We will see what is wrong.

Sarah, will you pour some tea for Miss Bump? She has had a shock and it will be good for her, and you, too."

Roslyn went with Mrs. Chilton, with Gladys following, in a state between horror and felicity. If there were to be tragedy, she was in her right place,—in the thick of it, as she would have said.

Mr. Wong's door was closed and nothing could be heard in the hall except the ticking of the old clock on the landing. Mrs. Chilton waited a moment and then she tapped lightly.

"Go away, do," cried Mr. Wong's voice from within. "I'm busy. I've told you that twice, you silly thing!"

Gladys vanished down the back-stair like a shadow but Mrs. Chilton understood.

"It is not Gladys, Mr. Wong," she said more loudly. "It is I, Mrs. Chilton. May I see you for a moment?"

They stood in suspense while his footsteps crossed the floor and came toward the door. If he should spring out at them!

"Oh, Mrs. Chilton, I am so sorry to have received you so. It was a mistake, I assure you," Mr. Wong said in accents of genuine contrition. "I was vexed with the maid because she persisted in knocking, after I had told her I wanted nothing. I am sure I did not ring the bell since I came in, but she insisted that I had."

He appeared entirely sane. Indeed, he looked more attractive than ever in his earnestness. It was incredible that he had, as Gladys said, howled for

Hop Kee. Mrs. Chilton, however, was bent on getting to the core of the matter.

"Gladys told us you were calling for Hop Kee," she said quietly. "He has not been here for over a week. I thought you had taken him with you."

"I haven't laid eyes on him," he assured them warmly. "He had explicit directions to stay here while I was away,—the scoundrel! When did you see him last?"

Roslyn spoke quickly. "Just six days ago, over by Muriel's angel." She might as well be truthful, now that she saw that Mr. Wong was not shielding his servant but rather accusing him of some wrong done to himself.

Mr. Wong looked puzzled. Then he bowed to Mrs. Chilton with a gesture of invitation to them both. "Will you do me the honor to come inside, while we compare notes on this matter?" he asked. "I am afraid there is more in it than I feared. At what hour did you last see him, Miss Blake?"

"About midnight," replied Roslyn and then, regardless of her promise and trusting him implicitly, she told the whole story of her walk and the robbery. Mrs. Chilton was silent and pale with dismay; Mr. Wong listened and questioned her closely.

"Where did you get this necklace you say Hop Kee stole from you?" he demanded, rather coldly. "Your description sounds like one that was in my possession a short time ago."

"My father left it to me," she answered steadily. "He told me it was an imitation. The snuff-bottle was genuine, he said."

He stood frowning before her and then he said slowly, "I do not understand. I do not understand. The necklace was entrusted to me by my dear mother, unknown to the family. I was to keep it for her, if The Dowager would not accept my brother Chen. It belonged to the wife of the Lords of Sun-Ping from generation to generation. Are you sure you had it before I came?"

He was satisfied of her truth when she assured him it had been in the beaded pouch for many years. He took a turn about the room and came back to stand before Mrs. Chilton.

"May I tell you the whole story, Mrs. Chilton?" he asked rather solemnly. "I know you will respect my silence when you hear it. My mother was the Clara Bruce you have heard of and she did not die in the first year of her married life. She was taken from Hong Kong back to the household of her husband's people in the Sun-Ping province of Hunan."

Roslyn thought his voice sounded hard and stern when he said, *her husband* rather than, *my father* and she wondered at it.

"There she dropped from the twentieth century back to medieval days," went on Mr. Wong with stern lips. "My grandmother hated the Westerners and persecuted her accordingly. When I was born, instead of rejoicing there was lamentation because of my fair hair and blue eyes. As I grew up, I learned to hate the entire household; the entire household, you understand. My mother, who had a proud spirit, would have been broken long ago if it had not been for the hope that was in her that, when

I was grown, I might find my way to her own country and make a place there for her to escape to. I came directly here to get news of her family, from whom she had never heard since she landed in Hong Kong. My father saw to that. I could not reveal my purpose to Hop Kee. It was for her sake."

"Poor lady, she must have suffered," murmured Mrs. Chilton, while Roslyn thought, "And Clara Bruce is his mother! What would Mr. Chilton say to that!"

"The Dowager set my dear friend Han to guard me," Wong went on. "He was always with me. She disliked me and loved to thwart me, but Han was always kind. After my father died ten years ago, I tried to escape from England where I was at school but failed. This time Han grew careless or more sympathetic, and I got away. I brought with me some jewels. A diamond heart, in case of need, and the famous Wong necklace. Both have disappeared with Hop Kee."

"But how could there be two necklaces?" cried Roslyn impetuously. "I had one, you know. Did your wife have another?"

"Wife?" fairly shouted Mr. Wong. "I have no wife. The Dowager tried to arrange a marriage; that was another reason for my coming here."

"You sent a cablegram ——" Roslyn began.

"How you discovered that I do not know," he returned coldly. "But that message was to my mother. I sent for her to come to America. She must be half-way here by this time. I had hoped to hear from her ——"

Mrs. Chilton gave a start. "The cablegram, Roslyn. Will you get it?" To Mr. Wong she explained, "It came some time ago but I had no address . . ."

When Roslyn came back with the envelope he was bending over Mrs. Chilton's hand, and saying, "You are goodness itself to me, dear lady. My mother will be fatigued and perhaps ill from travel and will be thankful to have the comfort of your presence. You shall not be the loser for accepting my offer."

He took the cablegram from Roslyn with a frigid bow. It was plain his opinion of her had fallen a degree or two since her speech about his wife. He read the message slowly, with a puzzled brow.

"She has arrived by this time in San Francisco, if the boat was on time," he told Mrs. Chilton. "There is strange news here; much news. Our cipher is well arranged for that. She has heard from Han, she tells me. He has the necklace, which he got from a young lady who had stolen it from me."

"Mr. Han?" cried Roslyn, and then a sudden memory flashed across her mind. The night of the Ball, Mr. Han in his gorgeous robes lingering behind in the upper hall while she went down, his sad glances and reproachful quotations. "He took it out of my room! He thought it was yours. It's a nightmare. I don't understand it."

Suddenly Mr. Wong struck his palm on the table. "I have it," he cried. "At last, it has come to me. I had a faint memory but now ——"

He told them how his mother had had an imita-

tion of the famous necklace made in the first year of her marriage, because she dreaded wearing so valuable a jewel; how his father had raged at her paltry western thrift and commanded her never to wear the imitation necklace; how as a child of twelve he, with his mother, had been rescued from a street mob during a brief revolution in the province by a foreigner who took lunch with his father and to whom his father had presented a snuff-bottle in hypocritical pretense of gratitude.

"He would have preferred us to be slain to make way for another number one wife and for my brother, who is wholly Chinese," Wong said. "He laughed because the foreigner accepted the snuff-bottle,—the poorest of my grandfather's collection—without seeing the flaw in it. It was to this foreigner that my mother sent me with a parcel in a beaded bag. I intercepted him as he left the palace. He was a fine, laughing man."

"My father!" Roslyn had the story of the necklace now. It was the imitation necklace that had been secretly given to Henry Blake by Mrs. Wong in gratitude for his bravery. He had been right about its value.

With the cablegram and Mr. Wong's memories and Roslyn's testimony, they got at the truth by degrees. Hop Kee had been the emissary sent out by the Dowager to keep an eye on the necklace, which she guessed to be in Wong's keeping, and to spy on Wong, who had been compelled to accept him as a servant. Mr. Han, who also had secret knowledge of the jewel, had mistaken Roslyn's for the

real necklace and condoned her supposed theft but carried it out of harm's way. Roslyn had nipped up Mr. Wong's treasure under the impression that it was her own property.

"Han must have your necklace with him," said Mr. Wong summing it up. "I do not know where he is but——"

Mrs. Chilton told him of her letter and of Roslyn's. "He will be overcome when he learns his mistake," she said. "He is so kind and well-meaning. Will he return here, do you think, when he knows that your mother has arrived?"

Mr. Wong laughed. "He had better. The Dowager will play the dragon if he goes back to the palace, now that my mother is no longer there. He will come to us here, I can promise you. I shall write him at once. The dear old chap hated to go and will be glad to be with us again."

Roslyn was puzzling over something more. "The letter to Mrs. Wong, that I put under your door," she said. "Did Hop Kee write that, or was it Mr. Han? The writing was very clear and plain."

Mr. Wong stared. "I saw no letter," he replied, glancing at the floor by the door.

"I put it in under the door," she insisted. "I intended giving it to you . . ."

He went to the door, stooped, felt the carpet and then tugged at something. "There is an advertisement of some sort under the carpet," he began. "No, it's a letter, by Jove."

It was the long envelope. The writing puzzled him. He had never seen it. He opened it with a

frown and drew out the contents. Five new, smooth yellow-backed thousand-dollar bills! A card dropped out and he read it aloud. "For my little Clara, from her loving father. To buy dolls with next Christmas."

Senator Bruce's lost bank-notes! He had hidden them in this envelope in the cubby-hole in the attic during one of his wandering spells, forgotten what he had done and broken his heart over the supposed robbery. It was a tragic message from the past.

Roslyn excused herself at last and went down to tell the amazing news. She found Miss Bump and Miss Sarah chatting comfortably over the fire. Gladys had been in to assure them that Mr. Wong had gotten over his fit and all was well above stairs. They looked up with interest as she entered.

"What in the world have you been doing up there?" demanded Miss Sarah. "The tea is cold. I knew it was only some of that foolish Gladys' melodramatical nonsense, that was why I remained perfectly calm."

Roslyn told the amazing story of how the famous jade necklace and its replica had passed from hand to hand in the tangle of circumstance that had caught Mr. Wong, dear old Mr. Han, Hop Kee and herself in its web and how the real necklace was to be allowed to go unmolested on its way to China to grace the bride of Chen Wong. She wound up with a fitting climax.

"Mr. Wong wants to buy Belleview for his mother. He is asking Mrs. Chilton for Muriel's

hand, just like an old-fashioned love-story. Mr. Han is to come back and live here with them and help Dr. Briggs with the biography. Could you make up a better ending than that, Miss Bump? The prince will marry the lovely lady of the enchanted tower, and they will be happy ever after."

"The blossoms of young love," murmured the authoress with emotion. "There's a celebrated pianist in the story, too, my dear Roslyn. You forget the girl who played for the electrician. Miss Gordon, I must have another cup of tea, to drink the health of the young people."

"With pleasure," returned Miss Sarah primly. "The name of the talented inventor,—the future wizard of—of—of *invention* must not be left out . . . Mr. Robert Allyngham Chilton," and she held out her hand for the cup. "Roslyn, you must drink success to the whole family."

Roslyn looked out over the whitening lawns away toward the summit of Fortune Hill already dim with thickly falling snow, and the cup in her hands was forgotten. "Good fortune has come to me," she thought dreamily. "Better, oh, far better than even I hoped for that day when Capponi sent me home with that motto of his,—that splendid motto, 'Nothing is impossible' . . ."

Aloud, she said with a little catch in her voice, "Father was right about the necklace, you see. He was always right. I wonder if he knows . . ."

THE END

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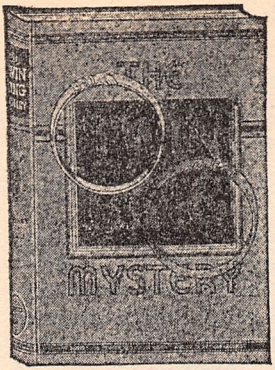

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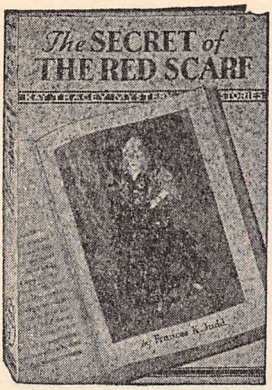

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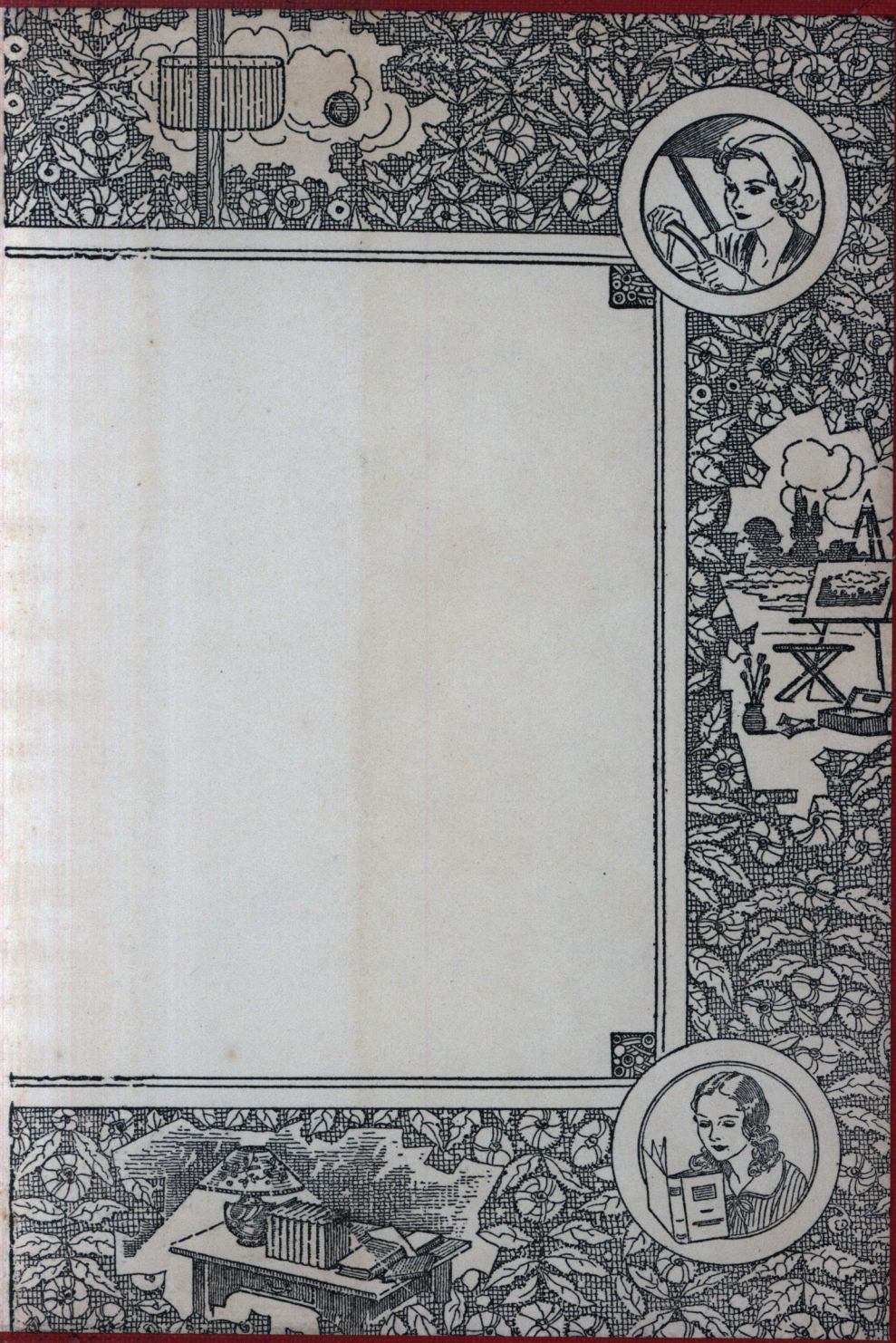
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